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March 23, 1886.

Vol. XVIII.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 452.



THE STREET BOY'S VOICE RUNG OUT SHARPLY: "POLICE! POLICE! LET UP THAR, YOU MEASLY PIRATE!"

OR,
FOUL PLAY AND FAIR.

BY JO. PIERCE,
(Of the New York Detective Force.)
AUTHOR OF "GAMIN BOB," "BOB O' THE BOW-
ERY," "THE VAGABOND DETECTIVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A REBELLIOUS FAMILY.

ANDREW WELLBURN, Esquire, was reading his evening paper in the sitting-room of his fine house. It was in the early evening, and he had just finished his six o'clock dinner and retired to this room for quiet and comfort.

He was a man of three-score years, and, as time had not been particularly kind to him, his hair and beard were gray almost to whiteness.

He was cashier of the Bonanza Savings Bank.

and lived in this house with his family. People in general spoke well of both him and the other members of his household; but it often happens that people in general know but little where they think they know a good deal.

Mr. Wellburn looked up as a footstep sounded, and then lowered his paper as he saw his only son. The young man's name was Edward, and he was an overgrown person of twenty-one. He was plainly of a less refined, delicate and sensitive nature than his father, and people did not like him as well.

Indeed, some people went so far as to say that Edward's coarse, heavy features, equally coarse black hair, and his shifting eyes, were indicative of a nature which might have made him a criminal had he not luckily been born the son of a rich man.

Yet, physiognomy to the contrary notwithstanding, it remains a fact that such men often rank high in point of honesty, while the refined, sensitive man like the elder Wellburn goes astray.

Edward nodded as he came in, his manner being stiff and sullen.

"I've got a word to say to you," he observed.

"Very well; say on."

"It's about Olive Pray."

Mr. Wellburn frowned.

"What about her?"

"Mother says that you have decreed that Miss Pray must leave the house."

"Such is the fact."

"Well, I'd like to know why?"

Edward spoke belligerently, insolently, but his father heard him quietly.

"Because I don't approve of Miss Pray."

"Well, I do!"

The young man spoke defiantly, and then thrust his hands into his pockets and squared himself off with increased insolence.

"So I have observed," replied Wellburn, dryly.

"Glad your eyes are so good. Possibly, however, you haven't caught on to the fact that Olive is my betrothed. Such is the fact, anyhow."

Wellburn, senior, did not seem surprised. He was not surprised, but the news which he heard was most unwelcome. It was because events had led him to fear that such a thing might come to pass that he had resolved to free the house from the presence of Miss Pray.

"Are you in earnest?" he gravely asked.

"You can gamble dollars on it—I am! I have asked Olive to be my wife and she has consented, so you see there is no use of your kicking. The best thing you can do is to accept the inevitable, and use my girl well, governor."

The senior Wellburn looked coldly disapproving. He had no affection for his coarse son—in fact, the young man had never done anything to deserve affection—but he cordially disliked Olive Pray and did not intend that she should become a member of his family.

She had been for nearly a year an inmate of his house, having come there because Mrs. Wellburn desired it. The latter lady, by the way, was Andrew's second wife. She had once lived in Buffalo, and it was from there that Olive came, if all statements were true. She was Mrs. Wellburn's niece, which explains why she came at all, but the master of the house had often wished that she had been at the bottom of the Red Sea before ever he saw her.

She was a diminutive lady for one who had seen a score of years, and her voice was very soft and bland, but, little by little, Mr. Wellburn had been finding out her true character.

Briefly summed up, he knew she was untruthful, deceitful, avaricious, a mischief-maker, and his suspicions were so strong that she had stolen sundry missing articles in the house, that he would have had her arrested had she not been his wife's niece.

It was these facts, combined with his suspicion that the girl had won Edward's love, which had led the elder Wellburn to wish to get rid of her.

He was not surprised at the storm which he raised, but, as Edward was his son, he had some regard for his future, and now attempted to show him how undesirable a person Olive was.

He failed to carry his point, but did raise a sizable "row." It was not the first father and son had had. A natural antipathy had always existed between them.

Singularly enough, Mrs. Wellburn—Edward's step-mother—had always been the boy's ally, and made matters all the worse. She incited Edward to rebellion, upheld him in his opposition to his father, and proved anything but a proper guide for the willful youth.

Between the two, Andrew Wellburn had led a life of misery, and, though he carried an erect head among his outside associates, it had led him to acts which would never have been his otherwise.

There was another son, Willis, of whom we shall see more hereafter.

But to return to Edward's interview with his father.

After a long, stormy discussion it became clear to Wellburn that his obstinate offspring could not be moved, and his age prevented any coercive step, but the fact remained that he was master of his house, and he intended to remain so.

"Very well," he said, coldly, "you may continue your devotion to the girl if you will, but not in this house. Miss Pray must go!"

"She must?" echoed Edward, scornfully.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Am I sure? Well, you shall see."

"I will see. I'm not going to have my future wife turned out like a beggar."

"Why not say 'like a thief'?"

"Do you assert that she is one?"

"No, for I don't care to endure the disgrace of proving her one. Were it not for that, I would hand her over to the law."

"You shall repent this," cried Edward, his dark face growing pale with rage.

"You are at liberty to attend her in her exile."

I have had enough of you and her, both. Should you so elect, you can go also; but you must understand that, if you go, my doors are forever closed to you."

"I shall not go."

"Just as you say."

"Nor will Olive go."

Andrew Wellburn's forehead contracted sharply.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Just this: You are not going to drive her away!"

"Edward Wellburn, are you mad?"

"No, but I know what I am talking about, and I'll prove it in a short time. Mark one thing down—Olive stays in this house."

With this defiant assertion, the young man strode out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

His father looked after him with a frown.

Quarrels between them had been frequent, but never before had Edward so boldly and insolently defied him. It was a magnified repetition of scenes which had imbittered the cashier's whole life, and he felt the bitterness of his situation keenly.

He no longer was in mood for reading, and the paper dropped unnoticed from his hand. What was to be done with Edward? Naturally of a headstrong, perverse nature, the boy had never had proper training. His father had been away to business, and the step-mother had sown only tares in the youthful mind.

Now, the harvest was come.

What to do with the crop of rebellion he hardly knew, but he had a good share of firmness, and did not waver an atom from the position he had taken.

If Edward persisted in holding to Olive Pray, he must leave the house.

The cashier was thus thinking when the door again opened. This time it was Mrs. Wellburn who entered. She was about ten years younger than her husband, and rather a handsome woman, though there was that in her bold, black eyes, and about her tense, thin lips, which was not prepossessing. She was tall and graceful, dressed well, and had always maintained the family dignity outside the house.

Just at present her expression was more belligerent than dignified, as Andrew saw at first glance.

"I have seen Edward," she observed, quietly, as she seated herself.

"Have you?"

Mrs. Wellburn waited for comments, but the cashier remained coldly silent and indifferent.

"Furthermore, I am surprised that you should take such a course with your own son," the lady continued, with some acerbity.

"Possibly you have come as his agent," dryly suggested Wellburn.

"I have, if such is the term you prefer. I come as his friend—his and Olive's."

"We have already discussed Olive's case. As for Edward, he has my ultimatum, and he can take whatever course he prefers. Let us not refer to it further."

"With your permission we will refer to it further. I desire that Olive remain in this house—as Edward's wife."

Coolly the woman made known her position;

made it known more by manner and tone than otherwise, for both were defiant and insolent.

Andrew Wellburn had never been more angry, but he controlled himself with a powerful effort and sat looking at her with outward calmness.

"Mrs. Wellburn," he said, earnestly, "you and I have often differed, but you cannot say you have not had your own way in the past. I have often yielded to you when yielding was folly. Now, understand me, I shall yield to no one. Olive Pray leaves this house, and I shall not raise a finger to prevent Edward from following her."

The wife sat very quietly, but her eyes gleamed like those of a snake.

"Andrew Wellburn," she replied, in a hard voice, "I will convince you that I have a voice in this matter. You shall not drive Olive and Edward away. Try to do it, and I will publish to the whole world the fact that you, in your official capacity as cashier of the Bonanza Savings Bank, are a defaulter!"

The blood retreated from Wellburn's face with a rush.

He sat staring at his wife in speechless consternation.

She laughed mockingly.

"So! the shot goes home, does it? Oh! I suppose you thought your crookedness unknown to all, but I am not so blind as you supposed. I know more of your games than you think. Instead of spending your time at home, like an honest man, you are all about the city by night as a brawler—or whatever your line of weakness is. All this requires money. Where do you get it? Why, bless us, you are cashier of the bank, and there is the people's money—what you have not stolen!"

The cashier's alarm did not seem to abate, and his voice was tremulous as he exclaimed:

"What mad idea is this?"

"Your idea was the mad one; the law takes notice of such deeds as yours. Bah! did you suppose me wholly blind? I am anything else; I have known the truth for some time. What of it? If the affair becomes known I am not the one who will go to prison."

Her mocking, exultant manner did more than anything else to irritate Wellburn, who impetuously exclaimed:

"Well, neither would you reap a harvest from such an exposure. You would practically be left a beggar."

"We won't speak of that," the woman answered, her manner showing that she disbelieved this statement. "The point I wished to make is this: Will you allow Olive to remain here, or are you willing to have your crime made public?"

"By which I infer that you threaten to make it public?"

"That is what I mean."

Husband and wife looked steadily and hostilely at each other. It was not their first clash, but it was the most serious.

"Yield your point and allow Olive to remain, and Edward to see her as he has done, and you are safe," the woman added. "Refuse, and we know how to act. We will not spare you."

Still Wellburn did not answer. He sat looking at her for several seconds, and then abruptly arose.

"We will speak of this again," he said, in a hard voice, and passed from the room.

His face showed that a great inward struggle was going on, and he put on his street garments without a very clear idea of what he was doing. He went as far as the door and then paused, hesitated and turned about. Softly he went upstairs and moved to one of the doors opening from the hall.

He opened it carefully.

A light burned inside, and by the table a boy of about thirteen years sat reading. This was the cashier's younger son, whose life dated from the day on which his mother died.

He was very unlike Edward, being slight and delicate, with light-brown hair and a face as refined and gentle as that of a girl. He was, however, the intellectual member of the family, and the light of his father's otherwise wretched life.

The second Mrs. Wellburn had never been able to influence him, and his disposition was thoroughly good.

Andrew Wellburn stood in silence at the door for several minutes, for the boy had not heard it open; then he softly retreated and went downstairs again. His face was full of mixed emotions, in which love for the boy and misery predominated.

As he reached the lower floor a loud, clear voice began singing in the parlor. It was that

of Olive Pray. The cashier opened the door hurriedly, anxious to be away, and went out. Out to what?

CHAPTER II.

A STREET BOY'S ADVENTURE.

"WAL, I don't see no partic'lar reason fur hangin' round hyar. Things seem quiet, ef ther streets is full o' measly cut-throats an' pock-pickets, an' I reckon I'll have ahead an' anchor my corporal body in ther glitterin' abode o' wealth whar me an' Stumpy bucks. Mebbe, too, I'll hev an adventur' goin' home."

The speaker was a boy of about sixteen years. The scene was Grand street, New York.

Who has ever been on this thoroughfare by night without carrying away a mental picture of it which must long remain? It is like a tributary of the Bowery in a double sense. The people who tread the one street also tread the other, though the Bowery is by far the more frequented.

But, Grand street is seldom deserted, and in the early hours of the night its sidewalks echo the tread of many people. Rich and poor pass in the glare and glitter of the electric lights, though the former class is in a hopeless minority. The great majority is composed of poor people, and many of them are of a vicious turn of mind.

There are more dangerous places in great Gotham than Grand street, but there are far safer places. The tramp, the pickpocket, the garroter, the sneak thief is there. He goes to ply his trade, and the field is favorable.

The person whose soliloquy opened our story, looked "to the manner born." Clearly, he was a city boy; one of that sharp, precocious, world-wise class who are toughened by hard knocks from infancy.

All too often this life makes them vicious, in which case they go to swell the crowd of evil people already in prison, but many are honest in spite of fate; and of this class was the boy before mentioned.

He was about moving away after his muttered words, when two men came out of a dark doorway and paused near him to light their cigars.

Flashy looking fellows were they, and he had no trouble in "sizing them up." The upper part of the building from which they had come was a gambling-house, and those who frequented it, gamblers. If this fact was not known to the police, it was to the boy, though he had never been inside. Entrance, in fact, was extremely difficult.

The two men, failing to see the boy, began to talk.

"Wellburn is playing heavily to-night."

"Yes, and drinking even more heavily."

"He's bound to go to ruin."

"Reckon you're right there."

"He's a fool. He has a family, and I must say he has no business to act the fool under such circumstances. I'm no saint, but then, I'm a bachelor."

"Wellburn is in that mood when a man drives straight to the devil if his horses hold out. He's bound to go his length, and the boys are not reluctant to help him. These are good cigars, Sam."

"Fine. What did they cost?"

The reply was lost as they moved away. Their minds had abruptly changed subject, but not so with the listener.

He looked after them thoughtfully.

"Wellburn! I never heard o' but one man o' that name. He is ther cashier o' ther Bonanza Savings Bank. Can't be him, o' course, fur ther directors o' ther bank wouldn't hev no gambolier fur cashier—leastways, I hope not, considerin' as how my cash is in that 'ere bank."

The idea of a ragged street boy having money in a bank would have seemed ludicrous to some people, but it is a fact that many New York boys are wise enough to save up their pennies and nickels thus, and this boy had considerable in the Bonanza.

He looked up thoughtfully at the building, for the possibility that the Wellburn mentioned by the other men might really be the cashier, had rather discomposed him.

"Ef it's him, jest ez like ez not, he's gamblin' away ther funds o' ther bank. Cashiers hev a leanin' that way, I regret fer ter say, an' it may be my own ducats he's a-singin' round ter-night. I'd like ter see ther chap, I jist would!"

His wish was granted much sooner than he had expected. The door opened again and another man came out.

His manner was not so careless and self-reliant as that of the other men. He came out and then paused on the sidewalk, looking up and

down the street. The boy saw that he was considerably under the influence of liquor, and he saw more.

The man's face was haggard and wretched; he looked like one who had met with a great misfortune and was on the verge of delirium.

Worse than all, the young watcher recognized in him the very man he had hoped not to see—Wellburn, the cashier of the Bonanza Bank.

"Gosh all flea-bites! this is bad. Is this ther sort o' a chap I've banked my pile with? He's a measly gambolier, is he? Wal, this ain't 'cordin' ter Hoyle—not fur Joseph!"

Wellburn raised his hand and brushed it across his face. Perhaps the liquor had created a mist which obscured his vision, but his mind was clear enough for him to realize the situation.

"Gone—all gone!" he muttered. "Another night of folly, dissipation, loss. I am once more penniless. Curse the luck! will the cards never run to suit me? I am the football of fate—the unluckiest wretch alive."

It was a melancholy sight. He was far enough advanced in years so that his hair and beard were silvered with age, and there he stood in the street at midnight, alone, befogged with liquor and made temporarily penniless by gambling. And this was the man who handled the money of trusting thousands, day by day!

The boy observer felt that he ought to have a personal interest in the matter, and as Wellburn turned toward the Bowery, after a pause he followed.

"Mebbe he'll go an' bust ther bank, or skip ter Canada," he thought. "Jest ez wal that my heagle eye should be enter him. In ther name o' ther law, Mr. Badburn, or wotever yer name is, I'm arter yer, I be!"

He continued the pursuit, taking care to keep well in the rear, but Wellburn was not in mood to see or hear any one.

He walked on with unsteady step, furnishing one of those street scenes so pitiable and so common.

Only a few rods had he gone, however, when two men suddenly emerged from a small, dark cross street and fell in behind him.

The boy pursuer had started. At one glance he marked them as birds of prey. Ragged, dirty and lawless of appearance, they looked just like that class of men who live by means of dark deeds done at night.

What meant their sudden appearance at the heels of the half-intoxicated man?

"I'll bet a Dutch cheese they was in ambush fer some sech vagabones ez ole Wellburn," thought the boy. "Reckon they think he's loaded with cash an' spondulicks, an' they mean ter knock him silly an' scoop ther bullion. Pretty scheme that, but ef they tries ter put a bit in his mouth you'll hear this boss squeal!"

The youth was very much in earnest. He felt that Wellburn was in danger, and all his sympathy went against the roughs. What could be done? No policeman was in sight, and his strength would avail little when opposed to that of the thugs.

"The critters is goin' ter do him up, fer sure! Whar's there a copper? 'Course thar ain't none 'round when he's wanted—thar never is. Wot is ter be done? Them chaps mean biz, an' I ain't beef enough to stop 'em; an' it won't do no sort o' good fer me ter give ther alarm ter Wellburn. He ain't no more fit ter look out fer hisself than a two-year-old kid."

It was really a perplexing situation, and the boy continued to follow and look for a policeman.

He saw none, and matters soon came to a crisis.

The drunken cashier had evidently reached a point where the pursuers thought they could try their game successfully, for they suddenly pushed forward, and the boy saw one of them raise a blunt weapon which looked like a sand-bag.

It would not do to hesitate longer.

The weapon was hovering over Wellburn's head.

If it descended it might deal a fatal blow.

The street boy's voice rang out sharply:

"Police! police! Let up thar, you measly pirat!"

The warning came too late; the murderous hand fell, and Wellburn, heavily stricken, dropped to the sidewalk.

The cry, however, was not without effect, as was speedily shown. Despite the fact that their prey lay at their feet, they ran ignominiously away, never stopping to look behind them.

The boy laughed aloud.

"Gosh all pertater-bugs, them is chaps o' sand, they is. Strange that they got up grit enough fur sech measly work. Wal, so long;

we kin do without yer, ez ther toad said when he swallowed a boa-constructor. Hello! he's a-squirmin'!"

The last remark referred to Wellburn. He was feebly trying to rise, and the boy hastened to his side.

"Low me ter give ye a boost. Grapple onto my paw an' elevate yer corpus. Brace up! Legs ain't wuth much, be they? Wobble 'round like a hose-pipe, don't they?"

He had been trying to assist Wellburn to his feet, but the latter was like a dead weight.

"Give me time," he said. "You are not the man who hit me, are you?"

"Not fer Joseph! I'm no gallus skull-demolisher. Not much! Them ez did it hez cut their lucky. Slapped you ker-slap over the cranium an' then skipped."

The old man, somewhat sobered but covered with dust and mud, looked at his new friend as closely as his blurred vision would allow.

"Boy, you look honest," he said.

"I feel that way."

"Who are you?"

"I'm a 'spectable member o' ther Board o' Trade an' Traffic, clerk o' ther Shoeblack Lx-change an' peanut nabob o' ther Bowery."

"Your name, I mean—what is that?"

"Wal, that's a pussional interog, but I don't mind sayin' it's Bob. Not Rob Burns, poet, nor Rob Roy; but twenty-first cousin ter Fatsy Burns, o' Skunk Holler. All this biographical is waste material, hows'ever. In ev'ryday life I'm ginerally called Bob o' the Bowery, or Gamin Bob, or Hotspur Bob. Seems ter be jest my luck ter git nick-named."

"Don't talk all night!" exclaimed the cashier, tartly; and then he added more gently: "I presume you are well acquainted here?"

"You kin bet yer bullion on that, boss."

"You see me in a v'retched plight."

"Jes' so. Ther tanglefoot hez wrastled ye, an' ther tough rapped ye silly. Hard lines, but I never knowed a man who could swim in whisky 'thout gittin' wet."

"Let that pass. I am weak and miserable, and I need some one to help me home. I have money enough to pay for a cab, but in my present condition I could not tell whether I was being driven home or not. The cabman might betray me. Will you go with me?"

Bob was about to answer affirmatively, but at that moment a hand fell heavily on his shoulder.

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERIOUS PURSUERS.

THE boy wheeled quickly, thinking that one of the toughs might have returned, but such was not the fact. A man was there, but not the kind of a man Bob had expected to see.

He was a tall person, but more than this was hid from view by the capacious folds of a cloak and a big, slouch hat. What sort of a man was under, and inside, all this amount of clothing Bob could not tell.

"What are you doing?" harshly asked the stranger.

"Me?"

"Of course. Who else could I mean?"

"Any one o' a hundred million feller-bein's, but that part ain't important. You mean me, so I will chant a eplry in yer starboard ear. I ain't doin' nothin'."

"You're robbing this drunken man."

"Robbin' yer granddad! Wot d'ye take me fur? Do I resemble a measly road-agent? Ever see my pictur' in ther Rogues' Gallery? Nixy! Not fer Joseph!"

"This talk won't save you. I shall call an officer and have you arrested."

The stranger spoke resolutely, and, as Wellburn seemed to have relapsed into unconsciousness, Bob perceived that the situation might grow serious. Wellburn had undoubtedly parted with considerable money, and he might see fit to chime in with the stranger and make matters hot for the boy.

"You're 'way off yer quadrant, mister," Bob asserted. "I'm hyar solely ez a Samaritan, an' not ez a gallus desperado. I was a-tryin' ter cheer up his nibs hyar, who is inter trouble clear over his high boots."

Luckily for the speaker, Wellburn saw fit to arouse from his abstraction at this point. He turned to Bob as to a trusted friend.

"My lad, where is the cab? I can't delay here. We must be off."

Bob saw keen eyes looking at him from under the slouch hat, and then the stranger spoke more kindly.

"Perhaps I was hasty in my remarks. Let me see you privately a moment, boy."

He stepped aside and, as he did not go far, Bob

followed, keeping his eyes well open. He did not trust the stranger to any great extent.

"Who is yonder man?" his new acquaintance abruptly asked.

"I ain't seen his keerd yit. Mebbe he's ther mayor, or a liquor-seller, or some other nabob," warily replied Bob.

"Don't you know him?"

"Ain't got ther honor o' his acquaintance, boss."

"Well, he is a man of high position here in New York, and, as he seems to have selected you to see him safely through his trouble, I want you to look out for him. Don't let him fall into the hands of any of the criminals who abound here."

As the stranger spoke he held out his hand, and the boy saw a crisp, new bank-note in it.

His first impulse was to decline it, for he felt anything but friendly toward the stranger, but he thought better of it and took it in. The note bore a figure five in one corner, and certainly seemed a generous present under the circumstances.

"I reckon him an' he will pull through all hunk. Thar ain't much about either on us ter tem t a red-handed highwayman. But, see hyar, mister—why be you so mightily int'rested in this hyar racket?"

"That is my business."

"Don't want a pardner?"

"No."

"Jest ez you say. I ain't goin' ter poke my nose in whar it ain't wanted. Some folks do."

"Meaning me?"

"You! Gosh! how you snap at ther bait!" retorted Bob, with a grin.

"Never mind; don't let your tongue run away with you. See! there is a cab. Better hail it, and get this man home."

It was good advice, and the boy proceeded to follow it. He made a bargain with the skill of one who knows the ways of cabmen, and the vehicle drew up beside Wellburn, who was then assisted into it by Bob and the driver.

When this was done the boy looked for the stranger, but that person had disappeared. Considering it no great loss, Bob gave the cabman proper directions, and they were soon rolling away.

Wellburn lay back on the seat and said nothing, but the expression on his face was not that of a happy man. Bob did not see fit to try to make him talk, but he was not at a loss to understand that the evening's losses at cards rested heavily on the cashier's mind. Perhaps, too, there was something more.

The same remark might be applied to Bob. He had no proof that Wellburn had used other than his own money, but he knew that a trusted official of a savings bank—a place where poor people deposited their all—ought not to be a gambler and drunkard.

"Like ez not he's been a-pilferin' an' a-gambolin' away ther hull stake, an' makin' beggars o' us all. W'ot is ter be did?"

He was considering this very important question when Wellburn spoke again:

"Are we going right?"

"Straight ez a die. We're on the Bowery, nigh up ter Cooper Institute. Listen, an' ye kin hear ther rhythmic rattle o' ther elevated keers."

"Boy, you are a treasure to me."

"Be I? Really, ye do me proud."

"What is your daily avocation?"

"My which?"

"Avocation—employment—work."

"Oh! jes' so. Wal, I'm a peanut nabob. Ever hear o' ther firm o' B. Bowery, Stumpy & Co.? Them is me, part on 'em, an' Stumpy is my pard. He's a chap wi' a bad leg an' a bunion on his left foot, but he's an awful likely lad wi' his dukes, is Stumpy."

"You sell peanuts?"

"Rather. It don't pay fer ter give 'em away."

"Suppose you could get better work?"

"Can I?"

"If you are the kind of a boy I take you to be, I would like to hire you."

"Ter do what, fer instance?"

"Oh, a little of everything. I want a boy about my premises who would be honest, shrewd and observing—also, close-mouthed."

"You don't mention diggin' taters, ner feedin' a rheumatic hoss on oats an' whip-lash."

"I have neither land nor a horse. What I want is that you should make yourself generally useful. I promise you that your work shall not be hard; in fact, it will be next to nothing."

"Folks don't generally hire other folks ter do nothin'," warily observed the boy.

"That is true, but, to speak plain, I want you to do a little detective work for me."

"Detective work?"

"Yes. Do you think you can?"

"Do I? Well, I should whisper! Why, yer see—Yas, o' course I kin. Reckon I'd be a reg'lar Pinkerton wi' a week's practice."

Bob had checked himself suddenly, just as he was about to say what deliberate thought told him was rash, and was wondering what would come next.

What "detective work" could Wellburn possibly have for him to do? Why did not such a high-toned person as Andrew Wellburn secure a detective, if he wanted any work done?

As though to answer this mental interrogation, the cashier said:

"I believe no one could fill the requirements of the place better than such a boy as you. An ordinary detective would be suspected; you will not."

"W'ot be I ter detect? Murderers or robbers?"

"You shall see to-morrow. I am not now in condition to transact business. Who was that tall man we saw on Grand street?"

"His nibs in the cloak an' behemoth hat?"

"Yes."

"Now you hev me foul, ez ther woman said when ther hawk ketched her chicken, but he was right int'rested in you, mister."

"He was? How so? Tell me all that happened."

Bob gave a succinct account of the tall man, which seemed to perplex and trouble Wellburn.

"I'm afraid that fellow means mischief."

"He can't tech ye ef ye hev on ther armor o' rectitude an' sech."

Wellburn did not answer. The remark, careless as it sounded, probably touched him more than he would have acknowledged.

The cab suddenly stopped. They had reached the corner of Fifth avenue and Twenty-first street, but as it was considerably short of their destination, they were somewhat surprised when the cabman appeared at the door.

"It may be all right, an' then ag'in it may not," he said, explanatorily; "but thar is another cab hangin' on our trail. I've tried enough tricks ter be sure that it is a-follerin' us. Ef you don't object, I don't, but I thought you ought ter know the fact."

"Are you sure it's following us?"

"Yes."

"I don't see why it should."

"Wal, if you don't object, I don't. The street is free to all, but I thought there might be mischief in the thing, you see."

Wellburn hesitated, and then glanced at Bob.

"Do you suppose you can alight secretly, work around and find out who our pursuer is?" he asked.

"Can I? Can a cat eat milk? O' course I can! Jes' let me out, an' I'll be onter 'em in a shake. But when shall I see you again?"

"I'll wait at the door of my house—no, wait; I am not fit to be up; come to me to-morrow at eight o'clock A. M."

"Jes' so. Hyer I go. You kin drive on, cabby, an' my blessin' go wi' yer. I'll be 'round, mister, ez agreed upon in ther catalogue."

With these words Bob skipped to the sidewalk, and at the corner of the street curled up in the darkest shadow, while the cab rolled on.

Bob had no great amount of faith in the plan arranged for him. If the second vehicle was really in pursuit, the halt of the first would be likely to arouse suspicion, and then the strangers would be stupid indeed if they allowed themselves to be investigated successfully. So argued the boy, but he lay back in the shadow and waited.

The other cab had not been visible when he took up his position, but only a few moments had passed when it—or one like it—rounded a corner and came along at a smart pace.

Probably the driver was trying to make up for lost time.

Bob was surprised, but he determined to do his work well, now that he was started on the job, and all his senses were on the alert.

As the vehicle passed, the driver looked straight ahead, and the boy was confident that he had been unseen. That he could do the next part of his work without attracting the driver's attention, he was not so sure.

There was only one thing to be done, and he proceeded to do it expeditiously. Arising from the shadow, he darted after the carriage. It was already past, but his fleet feet soon cut down the distance and he fell in behind.

Then he glanced again at the driver. Had he been seen? It seemed not. The man was still looking straight ahead; the sound of the horses'

iron-shod hoofs had deadened Bob's own steps, and his small figure had not been seen. All was ready for the next move in the game.

CHAPTER IV.

BOB SECURES A SITUATION.

His success up to this point had considerably encouraged the young detective, and, holding to the carriage and running lightly behind it, he proceeded to see who was inside.

The vehicle proved not to be a cab, as Wellburn's driver had reported, but a covered carriage of antique character. Bob noticed all this even then, and he concluded that it must be a private conveyance, though by no means a stylish one.

A small, oval piece of glass was fixed in the back part for purposes of observation, and he proceeded to put it to such use at once.

Raising himself clear of the ground, he applied one eye to the glass and looked inside.

The carriage was unlighted, but he saw that two persons were inside—a man and woman. What they were like he could not tell, and he had thought of no way when, as they rolled past a street light, so broad a gleam fell momentarily in the vehicle, that he gained the idea of utilizing the next.

He waited; they dashed past a lamp, and Bob used his eyes to the best of his ability.

"Jemima G. Jones!" he muttered, "I'll be torn ragged by a sassa-cuter ef 'tain't him!"

By "him" he meant the man whom he had seen on Grand street; the tall man who had so interested himself in Wellburn's case.

But who was the woman?

She had not been visible before, and Bob felt that there was, indeed, cause to regard them with suspicion. Why were they following the cab? Had it been with a mere friendly motive, such care would not have been taken.

"I'd jest like a squint at that female woman. She may be ole Wellburn's wife, but I'll bet my extra socks that she ain't. No, sirree; I sent a dark an' devastatin' scheme in all this, an' as I've sorter hired out ter Andrew, I must look arter his interests—an' ther woman."

This he essayed to do, improving each street lamp, but his success was not pronounced. That she was a tall woman, was plain, but her back was toward him, and he could get no view of her face.

"But I will," he thought, "ef I stay hyar till my toe-nails grow inter ther solid rock—I mean inter ther axle. I want her mental fottograph, as 'twere, an' ther only way is ter hang on—Hello!"

The train of his meditations was suddenly interrupted. He had become so interested, that he had forgotten all else, but he was suddenly brought to himself as a hand fell on his shoulder and he was plucked from his perch.

The carriage had been slowly turning a corner, and a vigilant policeman had captured him. He stood holding his prisoner as the vehicle rolled away, but Bob, seeing the danger that menaced him, began squirming vigorously.

"See yer, lemme go, will yer? I'll be left!"

"You are left—bet your life on that," retorted the guardian of the night.

"Lemme go! Ther boss will lam' me. He tole me ter hang on thar like sixty, an' he'll lick ther beef off my ribs ef I ain't a-hangin' when he gits home."

"Oh! come off!" the policeman replied. "You can't stuff me with such an antique chestnut as that. You live in Harlem and was trying for a free ride. I've stopped it, and now you may think yourself lucky if I don't take you in. Keep quiet and you'll be all right; make a row, and in you go."

There was no help for it. The officer meant what he said, and as Bob was not rash enough to drive him to the execution of his threat, he stood in utter silence until the man in blue saw fit to let him go.

Then he walked quietly for a block until beyond observation, after which he settled down to business and almost flew over the sidewalk in an attempt to overtake the carriage.

Luck was against him. When he reached Andrew Wellburn's house it was dark and silent, and no vehicle was visible.

"Wal, ther jig is up, sure ez pop-corn, an' all owin' ter that copper. Wonderful cute, he was! I'll bet a bumblebee's fang ag'in a feather duster that he's asleep on beat afore now. But them cattle in ther kerriage is gone. Yes sirree—they hev slipped away like a cake o' wet soap, an' all ther wharfores is unsolved. Reckon Andrew won't hev no mammoth opinion o' my detective gifts when I tell him all this, but I'll drop 'round in ther mornin' an' see w'ot he's got ter say. I'll sorter like a sit in his feudal castle, fur ef"

scoopin' ther boodle outer ther bank, I want ter draw wot I hev thar. I don't go no great shucks on no blear-eyed embezeleer—not fer Joseph!"

Bob's home was on Crosby street. It was not a luxurious place—indeed, the street is not noted for luxury—but it suited him and his boy friend, Stumpy, just as well as more pretentious quarters.

Stumpy was a lame boy, small and gentle, and Bob's opposite in everything but honesty, but the two were fast friends.

The following morning they ate breakfast together, after they had prepared it in company.

"Stumpy," said Bob, "I've got a sit."

"A situation?"

"Sech were the drift o' my ree-mark."

"What are you going to do?"

"The mayor hez hired me fer ter dust off ther jackets o' offensive partisans who object ter his style o' runnin' this hyar burg."

"Now, Bob, why do you want to talk so?" reproachfully asked Stumpy.

"Wal, I thort ye'd like ter know it, so ye wouldn't come monkeyin' round his serene nibs, wi' no kick ag'in' peanut regulations. Be content wi' ther code, pard, or I shall loom up afore you like an infant Jumbo, b'gosh."

"I'm afraid you're going to do more detective work."

"I'm goin' ter try, my unsophis'cated frien', I'm goin' ter try, wi' my hull caliber."

"What is it now?"

"Now you git down ter bed-rock an' p'int a moral. I dunno! I'm inter ther racket, but ther hull plot is bagged up like a yaller cat sunk in East river, fer ter die by unwillin' suicide. Fact is, a high-toned gent o' Murray Hill hez hired me. What I'm ter do I don't know; an', now I think on't, I dunno wot pay I'm ter gobble onter. It's a soft snap, though, fur I'm only ter set around an' keep my weather eye on ther compass ter see how ther scow is headin'. Now, don't ye look so blue round ther gills, Stumpy, fer 'tain't half so resky ez sellin' measly peanuts by the pint."

He spoke cheerfully, for Stumpy was not of his own bold nature, and needed a good deal of cheering up.

While the lame boy looked after the peanut-stand Bob was about the city a good deal, and in this way he happened on several crooked cases which he had worked up in true detective style—a line of business in which he aspired to excel.

On the present occasion he finally succeeded in quieting his companion's fears, and Stumpy then started for the Bowery peanut-stand.

Bob still had ample time to reach Wellburn's house before the hour set, so he remained in the room and occupied himself with wondering what the cashier could want of him. The possibility that he was desired to aid in "crooked" work did not escape his attention, and he felt that almost anything was liable to occur.

He was still thinking when a knock sounded at the door. He said, "Come in!" and the applicant obeyed.

Bob grew interested at first sight, for he recognized the tall man he had first seen on Grand street, the previous night, and, afterward, in the carriage.

What did this visit mean?

"Hallo, young fellow!" greeted the visitor.

"Hello, yerself!" was the cool reply.

"You are the boy called Bob o' the Bowery?"

"Right, ter a pin-head."

"Well, I want to see you," and the tall man helped himself to a chair.

"You're at liberty fer ter feast yer eyes on my benevolent features fer a limited period. I hev an engagement wi' ther gov'ner o' this hyar State, an' ez he'd feel wounded bad ef I disa'p'inted him, you will please do yer biz quick. Ez we say at ther Board o' Trade, 'this is my busy day.'"

The tall man looked surprised.

"You've got a glib tongue," he observed.

"Ef yer come ter buy it, you may ez wal slide. 'Tain't fer sale—not fer Joseph!"

"Never mind. You know me, of course?"

"Know you? I don't know yer granddad."

"Didn't you see me last night?"

"Not fer Joseph!" promptly returned the boy, and he told the truth in one sense of the word; the tall man had so kept his face concealed on the previous occasion that Bob had seen only his wardrobe.

He saw his face now, or part of it. The stranger still wore his big hat, and a scarf was twisted around his neck in such a way that it was still difficult to make out what he was like. He wore a long, black beard, and his face was

not a bad one, but Bob was not inclined to like him.

"I am the man who spoke to you on Grand street."

"Oh! be you? Now you refer ter ther episody, I do remember yer classic build. Wal, wot's ther racket now, mister?"

"You remember the drunken man?"

"I should remark."

"Will you answer a question about him?"

"Wal, see hyar, now," and Bob shut one eye and looked craftily with the other, "I never see'd a hoss but had two ears—less he'd been orphaned o' one o' them—an' in ther peresent case it's ther same. Afore we amble funder along ther road, lemme ask who you be thet hez sech an absorbin' int'rest in ther tragic affair."

"My name is Bargrade."

"Bargrade, eh? Live nigh here?"

"Not in Crosby street, I hope. I live in New York, but I must ask leave to keep my place of residence a secret. Let us talk of the drunken man."

"Wharfore?"

"Why?"

"Casually speakin', why?"

Bob rested his chin on his hands and looked calmly at Mr. Bargrade. He was wholly in the dark as to what that person was driving at, but felt serenely conscious of his ability to cope with him.

"I am interested in the case," Bargrade replied.

"I observed ther fact."

"Now, allow me to ask where that man came from."

"Why didn't you ask him?"

"I thought at the time, that I didn't care."

"Why do you care now?"

"You are confounded inquisitive!"

"Then thar is a pair on us."

"See here, boy, I am willing to do the fair thing by you. Last night I gave you a five-dollar note. Here is another for you, if you will act sensibly and answer my questions."

"Wal, ther rustle o' a bank-note is an allurin' sound, I allow, an' ef yer interrogs strike me ez bein' sound on ther goose, I'll subscribe. Shout yer conundrums!"

"Who was that man?"

"I didn't ask his name."

"But you know him."

"Wal, who said I didn't? Le's skip that p'int an' perceed ter ther next. Name it!"

"I found you and him on the sidewalk. I have reason to believe you had not been with him long. When did you first see him? Where did he come from?"

"Oh! is that all you want ter know?" coolly returned Bob. "Wal, I kin elocidate on that p'int in a shake. I found him flounderin' around on ther sidewalk, like a mud-turkle on a campaign tower. He didn't say whar he come from, an' I don't know."

"Are you sure?" asked Bargrade, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"Casually speakin', I be."

"I don't believe you!"

"In ther language o' ther poick, 'nobody asked you, sir,' she said, b'gosh!"

"Tell me where he came from, and this five-dollar note is yours."

"See yer, mister—look me right squar' in my starboard eye. D'ye see anything brittle thar? Observe ary sign that I'm imbecile, foolish, weak-minded, half-witted, or a darned, measly fool? Casually speakin', I don't believe yer do. Ef so, looks is off ther plumb, an' not ter be bet on. Mr. Halfgrade, you're only wastin' time on me. Put up yer greenback—you'n' me can't trade."

Bob spoke decidedly. He did not know what this mysterious man wanted, but he had decided that it was Bargrade's intention to learn all he could and tell nothing in return. To deal with such a man was wholly useless, and he determined to be true to Wellburn.

Bargrade's face flushed.

"By George, you young scamp!" he exclaimed; "you will tell, or I'll have you arrested!"

CHAPTER V.

A DOUBLE PURSUIT.

BOB heard this announcement without any evidence of alarm. Conscious that he had done nothing for which to be arrested, he thought Bargrade was merely trying to frighten him.

"When you git ready, jest telephone ter Superintendent Murray, an' he'll prob'ly send up a hull regiment o' coppers. I'm knowed ez a des'p'it karakter, an' no seven common men would dare ter tackle me."

"Your levity is out of place," Bargrade harshly declared. "If you think me joking, you are

greatly mistaken, for I mean business. I am willing to use you well and pay for the information I want, but if you are stiff-necked and rebellious, the matter simmers down to just this: Talk, or I'll have you arrested for picking my pocket!"

"Eh?"

Bargrade repeated his last sentence.

"See yer," then said Bob, soberly, "hev I picked yer measly ole pocket?"

"No."

"Has anybody did so?"

"No."

"Then wot ther bewitched swine o' Persia be ye howlin' about, anyhow?"

Bargrade smiled darkly, and his expression was evil enough to make amends for all past blandness.

"Youngster, I don't take you for an unsophisticated chap, but I will say for your benefit that in this, our mighty city of Gotham, there are every week people arrested, tried and convicted, who are not guilty—people who get in other people's way and are thus removed. This is just how you'll be served, if you persist in your obstinacy. Once let me enter a charge against you and you are gone. What show has a ragged boy against a wealthy man?"

"So that's ther kind o' a measly snake you be!" Bob exclaimed.

"When I set out to do a thing, I do it regardless of what and who may oppose me."

Bob clearly saw that the man before him was a knave in the fullest sense of the word, but he was not by any means so alarmed as Bargrade would have had him.

He had friends who would stand up for him in an emergency, and he would probably have invited his visitor to drive on his team had it not occurred to him that there was a better way than sitting there and acting like a stubborn mule.

He had struck a mystery which he wished to solve, and the best way to do it was to act craftily.

"Strikes me you're mighty hard on a kid," he said, forcing a faint whimper.

"If you are sensible, you're all right."

"I don't b'lieve in givin' away all I know."

"Isn't it better than to get into trouble?"

Bargrade's voice had grown persuasive, for he thought that the boy was yielding.

Bob fixed his gaze on the five dollar note.

"You say you'll gimme that ef I speak right out in ther caucus, do ye?"

"I do."

"Then I'll shout, though it ain't no great p'le I kin tell ye. Ez fur whar he come from, it was out o' Den Magee's liquor-shop, which is nigh whar ye found ther old chap wallowin' on ther sidewalk."

Bargrade looked disappointed, and then gazed sharply at his companion.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Casually speakin', I'm pop-sure."

"Did you see him come out of there?"

"Wal, sca'cely that, but he were nigh ther door when my optics fell onter him, an' he couldn't hev come from nowher else. Set it down as right from ther keerd."

Bargrade did not answer at once, but Bob saw that his little fiction was working well. He did not, by any means, intend to put his visitor on the right track, and as it was not likely that Wellburn had been near Den Magee's saloon, it was a good place to which to direct suspicion.

"What did Wellburn—that is, the drunken man, I mean—what did he say?"

"Wal, he said all sorts o' uncomplimentary things ag'in' whisky, an' seemed ter feel measly mean about bein' drunk; but it were sorter mixed up an' vague, an' I dunno wot the words was now."

"Didn't he say anything to show what he had been doing during the evening?"

"No, he didn't, but, judgin' from ther way he acted, I should say he'd been swillin' down a pow'ful sight o' whisky, o' ther kill-em-quick brand; ther same that makes a man feel, ez it passes his gullet, ez though it were peelin' his toe-nails right off."

Bargrade asked other questions, but he learned nothing. Bob answered with an appearance of sincerity, though taking great care what he said. That his manner deceived the questioner was shown by the fact that, when the subject seemed exhausted, he passed over the five-dollar note.

He then arose.

"I'm sorry that you can't tell more, but I'll take the will for the deed."

Bob rattled the crisp note.

"Do you usually pay like this, mister?"

"Why?"

"'Cause yer style is munificent, an' ef ye ever want another job done at such wages, I'm yer huckleberry."

Bargrade looked at him keenly.

"Are you sure you're trustworthy?"

"Yer kin bet yer suspender buttons on that, an' them is delikit things ter resk."

"Then, perhaps I shall have work for you. Are you usually around here of evenings?"

"Yas, unless I'm visitin' a'tendin' ther consolidated Politican's Seance meetin's."

"And if I was to come in and ask you to go to Den Magee's, you could go without delay?"

"Jes' so."

"Then you may consider yourself informally in my employ. You shall lose nothing by it, whether I find work for you to do or not. I trust your conscience is not superfluously tender."

"Is a five-year ole rooster tender? Not unless he's kept too long arter killin'."

"That's the way to talk, my boy. Well, good-day; I'm off now. By the way, say nothing to nobody about this matter."

"I'm mum ez Grecian statoo."

Bargrade said good-day again and then took his departure. He left Bob still sitting on the stool, but his footsteps had not ceased to sound when the boy was on his feet.

He went to the window and watched the street door, and, when his late visitor came out, noted which way he went.

Then he glanced at the clock.

He had barely time to reach Andrew Wellburn's at the time he ought to be there, but it occurred to him that he could best serve Wellburn's interests in another way.

"I'll resk it!" he muttered. "I want ter see whar this measly chap goes, an' I'll foller him ef I lose all ther jobs I've got engaged. Gosh all fiddle-strings! how ther thing is blossomin' out! Ther only drawback is that I don't know head from tail, to it. It's a measly, complicated compleration, anyhow."

By this time he was out of the room and moving rapidly down stairs. When he reached the street Bargrade was still visible, walking north, and Bob prepared to pursue.

To follow a man by daylight on Crosby street is not always an easy task, provided one wishes to avoid discovery, but the hour was in Bob's favor, and more than the average of people served to make a screen for him as he glided along the sidewalk.

Bargrade, however, did not once look around. Probably he had no thought of pursuit, and he strode along with a brisk pace.

"Ef I kin git him inter his hole, I stan' a pretty fair chance o' gittin' right at ther root o' this hyar matter. He thinks he's an awful cute chap, but he ain't nothing a tall fur brains. Me work fer you, you measly crook? Not fer Joseph! When I git so hard up ez that, I'll buy a tin horn an' a strong-scented mackerel an' go ter peddlin' fish, I'gosh!"

The pursuit continued. Houston street was reached. At this point Bargrade turned toward the Bowery. Bob followed as before.

Reaching the latter thoroughfare, the man ascended the steps of the Elevated railroad. Bob did the same, and both purchased tickets and entered the station.

Luckily for the boy, an up-train came bowling along at that very moment, and seeing Bargrade make a rush, he did the same, and both were soon in the same car. Bob dropped into a vacant seat beside a big man who was reading a broadside newspaper, and, thus concealed, watched to see that Bargrade did not alight at any station unseen.

Unknown to the boy, he was watched as well as watching. Two men who had also entered the car at Houston street were sitting not far away, and seemed to be "sizing him up."

They had nothing themselves to boast of in point of good looks. Each was a fair specimen of the city "tough." With long, ragged hair and bristly beards they combined ragged clothes, omnipresent dirt, and features the personification of brutality. Men with such faces are seen in Gotham's courts every day.

These fellows, sitting at a point remote from both Bargrade and Bob, eyed each by turns, but seemed the most interested in the boy. They whispered as they looked at him, and had he observed them, he would have given an unfavorable mental verdict.

His attention was on Bargrade, however, and he saw little else until a station well up-town was reached. There Bargrade arose, and Bob promptly followed his example. Both left the car. The two toughs did the same, never losing sight of Bob.

As chance would have it, the four were the

only persons who alighted there. The toughs brought up the rear as all began descending the winding stairs, and after a quick look around, one of the evil pair drew a slung-shot from his pocket and they hurried on to overtake Bob.

CHAPTER VI.

SOMETHING FALLS ON BOB'S HEAD.

BOB went on, unconscious of what was transpiring behind him; he had eyes only for Bargrade, and did not once think of being followed himself.

As the leader of this antagonistic line reached the foot of the stairway, he turned and struck off briskly up the avenue. Bob saw that pursuit would now become more risky than ever, so far as danger of discovery went, and he paused to study the situation, still standing on the stairs.

He noticed a cab standing by the curb, almost under the stairs, and was just wondering if he could hire it, and thus follow more safely, when the sound of a footstep behind him attracted his attention.

He turned his head, but did not succeed in getting a view of the other parties. The two ruffians were at hand, and they acted quickly.

Down came the slung-shot, striking full on Bob's head. The boy dropped, and would have fallen entirely had not the other man caught him.

"Now, then," said he who had dealt the blow, hurriedly, "hustle him inter ther cab. Ef we git ketched at it, it's all day."

They caught up the small form, and, as Bob was momentarily stunned, met with no opposition from him.

It was an extremely bold and risky thing to attempt—to abduct the boy on a public street in broad daylight, with several people in sight—but they relied on the boldness, and the fact that he was "one of their kind," in appearance.

As they touched the sidewalk, they met a corpulent citizen face to face, and the gleam of his diamond fell full on Bob's face.

He looked uncertain, but the kidnappers were ready for the ordeal.

"Ef he don't have another o' them blasted fits afore we git him home, he'll be all right."

"Yes, ther doctor 'll save him ef he once gets thar."

With these specious words they hustled Bob into the carriage. A driver on the box viewed it with lively interest, and it was clear that he had expected them, though not the other part of his freight.

The corpulent citizen went up the stairs, and, in his anxiety to avoid heart troubles by hurrying, forgot all about the ragged boy.

Before he was up, the cab was whirling away, and in it went Bob and his captors.

One of the latter promptly tied the prisoner's hands and feet, while the former looked back.

"Are we pursued, Ben?"

"Don't see nobody."

"I'll bet the beer we're off scot-free."

"Looks that way."

"Hope we'll have as good luck at the house."

"Shall you really take him thar?"

"Of course."

"I have a feelin' that thar's danger in it."

"Danger! Why so?"

"Oh! I can't jest say, only that's my idea."

"I'll risk it. I don't know who the blazes this kid is, but he ain't high-cockolurum enough to have nobody howling because he's disappeared, and as he knows the old bloke, we may get a pile of information out on him."

"We ought to, fur we've lost the old chap."

"Never mind. It's dollars to cents that he'd have throwed us off the track as usual, an' we've got the kid safe. We'll make him tell all he knows, and he must know a good deal, or the man wouldn't have visited him."

Ben did not seem very strongly influenced by this line of argument, but he said no more.

The cab rolled on briskly; it was clear that the driver was making as good time as he dared in the streets of New York. They soon reached a part of the city known to the police as one of the worst quarters in upper New York, and it was clear that Bob was not going to a congenial place.

His captors had expected to see him recover speedily, but the blow must have been heavier than they thought. He did not recover.

The cab finally drew up in front of a dingy brick dwelling-house. The driver jumped down and opened the cab door.

"Why dbe divil did yez let dbe ould chap escape?" was his abrupt question.

"Just w'ot I asked Steve," Ben replied.

"Well, I had an answer ready, didn't I?"

snapped Steve. "Who's doing this biz, anyhow? I'd rather have the boy than the old one. Ten to one, if we had him, he wouldn't open a lip. The boy will and shall. Hustle him in!"

The door of the house had been opened, and the three proceeded to carry Bob in. This was soon done, the cab whirled away and all was quiet.

The abduction had been performed with signal success.

The presiding genius of the house seemed to be a fat colored woman. She looked actually benevolent, but had an unpleasant habit of snapping her strong teeth loudly together which was not pleasant.

In point of fact, she was a notorious criminal, and worse than either Steve or Ben.

The captive boy was laid on a sofa, and Steve called for water to revive him, but the woman had been looking at him critically and now announced that he would soon be around.

"Jes' you-uns keep wher' you be," she advised. "Ben's hand is heavy, an' when he hits 'em one dey ain't a-comin' round right off. But the chile will open his eyes soon or I'm a liar."

"I hope you've left the house well secured. Bet!"

"Of course I hab. Did ye eber know me ter do udderwise? I's s'prised at ye, Steve Rellix!"

She spoke with considerable asperity, but Steve wisely declined the gauntlet thrown at his feet. He knew her of old; she could be trusted implicitly in any work of villainy as long as she was well used, but once intimate that she was the inferior of the best man on the gang and she was liable to raise the biggest kind of a row.

Talk among themselves was brought to a sudden end as Bob opened his eyes. There was an expression of perplexity and wonder on his face, but it was evident that his mind was clear.

He arose to a sitting position and looked at the men. All his bonds had been removed, and there was nothing to show that he was a prisoner.

"Hello!" he observed, "w'ot sort o' a seance is this? W'ot means this concord o' people? Be I deceased an' bein' waked? Ef so, whar is ther mourners, an' wherfore ther wake? Ain't I still a-breatin'?"

"You're all right, young man," replied Steve.

"Jes' so—apparently. By the way, may I inquire who you be, an' w'ot ther riddle is? Thar is a dark shadder athwart ther horizon, as Jonah said when he swallowed ther whale— Say, whar be I, anyhow?"

"My lad, you've had an accident."

"Hev I? Hez it been pulled? Did it come hard?"

"A workman on the Elevated road accidentally let a hammer fall, which fell on your head and knocked you senseless. As you seemed to have no friends with you, I had you brought here, to be taken care of. I'm glad to see you better, my boy."

Steve spoke very blandly—almost with fatherly kindness—but Bob shut one eye and looked at him with a broad smile, while he tersely ejaculated:

"Gammon!"

"What do you mean?"

"Casually speakin', I mean that you can't stuff me fer no measly ole Christmas turkey."

"You talk in riddles," returned Steve, but there was a sharp inflection to his voice which showed that it was not much of a riddle to him.

"I s'pose you'd like ter hev me b'lieve your yarn about ther hammer, but I can't—not fer Joseph! D'ye s'pose I think they keep a hardware store on draught up them elevated structuraries? S'pose ther heavens rains meteoric hammers? Nixy—not this week. I allow that some solid combustible *did* fall on my cranium w' a 'dull thud,' but I opine that your arm sped ther measly missile."

Steve did not try to carry the deception further.

"You're a sharp one, I see."

"Right on a hair-edge, mister."

"Lock out you don't run against a snag. Well, let us admit that you have it about fine—what are you going to do about it?"

"Me? Wal, a blind hen can't pick up much bulk o' early worms, but any darned ole fowl kin sharpen her claws an' scratch."

"Once more you speak in riddles. Since it seems to rest with me, I'll come right to the point. You are my prisoner, taken with some trouble, but I don't intend to harm you if you're sensible."

"Casually vociferatin', your posish in this melancholy affair is kind an' philanthropic; but ef you want ter impress me forcibly, you'll open the door an' say 'Skip.'"

"You can easily earn the right to skip, for we are in no sense your enemies. All we want

is to have you answer us a few simple questions."

"Hum! Wal, what be they?"

"Who is the man you were following this morning?"

"Eh?"

Steve repeated the question.

"Who sez I was follerin' anybody?"

"I do. Don't try to dodge the point. I followed you from your Crosby street house, and saw you following him, and rode with both of you on the Elevated road. Now you see the folly of playing off; so let us come right to the point. Who was—"

"Allow me fer ter inquire, why was you follerin' me, mister?"

Steve hesitated for a moment.

"That point is immaterial," he finally replied.

"That's whar you are clean off. It's so werry important that it looms up like a pillar o' smoke in a starlight night. Wherfore was ye a-monkeyin' round my castle towers?"

"I will soon explain that to your entire satisfaction—you can rely on that. Let us drop the subject for now, while you answer my question. Who was the tall man?"

Bob again shut one eye and drew the corresponding corner of his mouth up.

"Strikes me you take me for a flat."

"What do you mean?"

"Casually speakin', I b'lieve you know a mighty sight more about him than I do."

"Then why should I ask you?"

"Jes' ter find out w'ot I know."

"You are wrong, boy; I know nothing about the man. Since you have this suspicion, I will say that I am trying to find out who the man is, for particular reasons; and that this morning I was following, not you, but him. See?"

"I hear, but not a see shines athwart ther wide 'spanse o' sky. W'ot's your rifle? W'ot d'ye want o' his nibs, anyhow?"

"You are too inquisitive," Steve replied, impatiently and angrily.

"I don't buy no pig in a poke, an' I won't elucidate w'ot I know 'thout you tell your little romance—not fer Joseph!"

"Yes, you will!" declared Steve, losing all patience.

"No, I won't!" coolly returned the boy, meeting the other's gaze unflinchingly.

"We'll see. I am prepared for just such stubbornness as this. Bet, give me the persuader."

The negress promptly passed over a heavy whip, which Relix cracked sharply in the air.

"Now, then," he exclaimed, "you will talk, or be cut into pieces with this lash. Which shall it be?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN WITH THE KNIFE.

STEVE'S appearance was really alarming, and he looked capable of doing all that he threatened, but Bob heard him without any appearance of fear.

"You'd better put down that cat-o'-nine-tails, mister. I don't keer a counterfeit half-cent fer ther measly thing, an' you'll lame yer arm all up, a-jerkin' it through ther atmosphere."

"I say you will either talk or be whipped!" shouted Relix, whose plan was to scare the boy if he could.

"I hain't no great objection ter waggin' my tongue, but you won't help ther thing any by carvin' my flesh. I don't skeer fer a cent. Natur' wa'n't kind ter me in that ere respex. I would ra'ly like ter be skeered, but I can't—not fer Joseph!"

The whip was held directly over him, but Bob did not waver in the least, and the easy smile never left his face.

"He's a young debbil!" cried Black Bet. "Gib me de whip an' lemme exorcise him. Give it hyar!"

"Keep off!" Steve ordered. "This is my affair, and I will manage it."

He then turned his attention again to Bob, and tried his best to conquer him. The boy, however, was proof against arguments and persuasion, and not a word would he say on the subject nearest Steve's mind. As the reader knows he could have told but little concerning mysterious Mr. Bargrade, but he read the fact that he was among people who would hesitate at nothing, and though it might be just as safe for him that they should think he held an important secret; while if he told the truth he was not likely to be believed.

Steve, however, did not believe him as it was. He thought his prisoner really knew all about Bargrade, and did not cease trying to get the desired information until he had raved himself hoarse.

He did not, however, strike a blow with the whip, and he finally lowered it with a closing burst of profanity.

"Well, you're a stuffy young cub, anyhow."

"Casually speakin', I'm a few in that ere line," Bob serenely replied.

"Nevertheless, I'll have it out of you."

"I don't want none o' yer measly ole ermetics—ef that's ther way you perpose ter git it outer me."

"See yer', boss," interrupted Bet, "will yer jes' do me a favor?"

"What is it?"

"Lemme crack dat sassy snip one over de ear. Do it, an' you'll make me happy."

"Not now, old girl, but if we conclude to cut his skin five or six inches across under the chin, you can have the job."

"Thank you, boss, an' doan' yer forgit it. I'd jes' like ter black his eye fur him!"

So saying the negress shook her big fist at Bob, but he viewed the hostile demonstration with his usual placidity.

"Don't do it, Lily White, don't! Ef ther black was ter spread, like it bez done on your classic features, w'ot a dark-eye it would be. See ther p'int, my colored frien'—dark-eye, darky."

This retort aroused Bet to a pitch of fury, and she rushed at the boy, but Steve pushed him away and succeeded in pouring oil on the troubled waters, metaphorically speaking.

"I am now going to shut you up, young cub," he then said, "and we will have another interview this evening. I am not disposed to waste many persuasive words on such as you, but I will make you talk or do you up. I want to know who that tall man was. By the way, what is your name, besides Bob?"

"Plato Socrates Smith, ter wit, namely," was the boy's prompt reply.

"You lie!"

"W'ot's ther English o' that?" placidly asked Bob.

Steve brought his foot angrily down on the floor. He had never seen another boy like this one; he seemed a stranger to fear, and as buoyant as a cork, and was as hard to govern as the wind.

"I'll break your will or your back!" he vowed. "I don't particularly aspire for your life, but unless you reveal what you know about that man, you will never go out of this house alive."

"Gas!"

"What?"

"Oh! ef you had a meter, an' a cross-eyed inspector, you'd do fur a gas-house. Ain't sure but ef I was ter pull yer nose, a dazzling light would shoot up like ther corpus o' a beheaded rooster. It's big enough—ther nose is. Whar do you put it, o' nights?"

Relix did not answer. He was angry enough to carry out his worst threat at once, but, as he did not want to do that, he did the next best thing. To waste words on such an irrepressible fellow was folly, so he shoved him into the room he had prepared as a prison and locked the door.

Then he turned to Ben.

"Did you ever see such a young imp?"

"Never, I swear."

Bet said nothing, but her face was full of fury. Bob's words to her rankled deeply, and she thirsted for revenge—dark revenge, at that.

"I'll bend his will yet," declared Steve.

"You'll never make him peach on ther tall man."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"Then I'll kill him!" Relix declared, in a voice of concentrated wrath.

"So'll I!" muttered the negress, under her breath.

Truly, Hotspur Bob was in a den of vipers, and he would be lucky to escape them with his life.

In the meanwhile he was taking matters very coolly and examining his prison-room. It had evidently been arranged for just such use, and, Bob suspected, had often been utilized before. The door through which he had entered was the only way out; the sole window, if such it could be called, was a square of dull-hued glass, which looked very thick and heavy, set in the floor above.

Through this came a feeble light by means of which he surveyed his quarters.

"Ef this ain't a measly fix, my name ain't Bowery Bob, ter wit, namely. I've been shet up by crooks, sharps, buncoists an' toughs-in-giner-al, but this hyar dungeon rakes ther tea-cake right off ther board, ker-wallop. Casually speakin', I'm inter it clean over my cavalry boots, that's a Talmadge fact."

His verdict seemed pertinent.

There was no way for him to break out of the room, and as he could not expect out ide help, his prospects did not look particularly brilliant.

"Won't poor Stumpy shed salt, sad tears when he finds me *non est*, not-thar-abus, this eve! Thar will be a void wacancy in ther firm o' B. Bowery, Stumpy & Co., ter wit, namely, an' great will be my pard's grief. How his lame leg will shake an' sigh!"

Bob shook his head, as though Stumpy's grief was the greatest trouble he had in the world, and made another circuit of the room.

"Strong ez a burglar-proof safe. Ef it had a sign o' a jillitine, or w'otever they called ther French machines w'ot chops off heads, it might be a Bastille. Yas, an' I'm a cornvict, put inter hock by a big-nosed, blear-eyed, uneddicated ole Bowery tough, darn him! Wish I's Samson now, an' I'd smash this shebang all ter glory Hannah Jane, an' mash 'em inter cheap hash!"

Bob was not Samson, and he soon satisfied himself that all his efforts to escape would prove unavailing.

Accordingly, he sat down on the sole chair which the room contained and prepared to take matters easily.

He could hear nothing from the other room, and judged that Steve Relix and his allies were in consultation elsewhere.

"Now, then, w'ot do ther gallus crooks want o' me? Why be they so exercised ter know who ther tall man is? Why don't they go ahead an' find out, 'stead o' merlestin' an' innocent, in-sophisterated youth like me? Gosh all pigeon-wings! ef I ever git outer quod I'll make 'em sing a mournful psalm, b'gosh! Ther detective firm o' B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co. is jest pantin' fur a job, an' I'll git arter 'em like a contagious eperdemic. I'll land 'em all in Sing Sing, or my name ain't Gamin Bob, ter wit, namely."

The forenoon was fast passing, and, as Bob remembered his appointment with Andrew Wellburn, he felt a strong desire to "hev one lick at ther measly crooks, jes' fer luck," as he expressed it.

What Wellburn would think of his failure to keep the appointment he did not know, and the chance that he desired, to enter the cashier's house, seemed so likely to slip away that he grew to hate Relix more and more every moment.

He had fully decided in his own mind that Wellburn must be embezzling the funds of the Savings Bank. Young as the boy was, he knew that when a man enters the path of dissipation he is likely to lose all sense of honor and forget whose money he is handling.

Bob had money in the bank in question, and it became the hight of his present ambition to gain admittance to the cashier's house and investigate.

He also wanted to see Bargrade again, and learn just who that mysterious person was and what he was trying to do.

The remainder of the forenoon wore away.

About noon Steve opened the door a trifle, set in a plate of food, and then retired without a word, ignoring Bob's salutation. This, however, did not disturb the boy's appetite; he ate with relish and method.

Then followed another lapse of time. So far as he could tell, no one was stirring in the house; the only sound he could hear was the distant rattle, grumble and murmur from the street.

Confinement began to worry him.

"This hyar is a cold deal," he said, disconsolately. "Ef I git out, I'll give these measly crooks a bite ter chew on that'll make ther jaws rattle. Hyar be I, a free an' lightened American citizen, cooped up like a gallus ole tiger in ther Central Park menagerie, an' nobody won't come 'round ter admire my majestic perperitions. Oh, I'd give a fresh ham sandwich if a small boy would come an' poke me wi' a stick."

This idea was in his mind when the key suddenly rattled in the door, which then swung back.

Black Bet appeared in the opening.

"Hello, charmer o' my soul an' tee-nails!" saluted the prisoner, genially. "Casually speakin', I'm right glad ter see ye!"

But Bet stood still and looked silently at him, an evil expression on her hard face.

"W'ot's ther matter?" asked Bob. "Got ther lockjaw, or a torpid tongue? Open yer molars, incisvers an' grinders, will yer, an' lemme hyar ther words o' wisdom which flood yer massive brain. Go it, my 'spected frien'; go it, like a lame hoss on a plank road!"

"Boy, you talks too much!" said Bet, in a deep voice.

"Not fer Joseph! Orator is my best holt. I've taken lessons with Cicero, Plato an' Demon-

sneezer, or w'otever his handle were, an' they all advised me fer ter let my eloquence ripple. Wal, why not let her ripple?"

"Bah! you tink you is awful smart!" cried the negress, "but I's gwine ter show you a thing or two. You make fun ob me, do you, jes 'cause I's g't a brack skin? You done talked wid de wrong one dis time, you fiend, an' I'll gib you a lesson you'll remember fer a long while!"

As she spoke she drew a long, ugly-looking knife from the folds of her dress, and flourished it about her head.

"Hello! w'ot's ther raffle now?" Bob asked.

"I's gwine ter fla you! Satan take you! you insulted me, an' now I'm gwine ter cut yer all ter pieces, you young thief!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"DODGE AND RUN!"

As Bet pronounced these words she waved the knife again, and her appearance was really startling. She looked ugly enough for any crime, and the knife also seemed to thirst for blood. Bob's first impression that she was capable of any crime received confirmation, and he knew that he was really in great danger.

Despite this, he retained his calmness to a surprising degree.

"Gosh ter gracious! how you talk! A'most make my blood stan' on end an' my hair curdle, b'gosh! Put up that measly ole toad-sticker, will ye? S'pose I want'er be slashed up like green cowcubers? Not fer Joseph!"

"It don't make no sort ob difference w'ot you want," Bet doggedly returned. "I's gwine ter kill ye. A l de men is out—I's been a-waitin' fer dis chaine all day, an' now I'll fix ye."

"See yer, my colored frien', ain't ye a leetle hard on a poor orphan w'ot ain't had ther advantage o' a college eddification?"

"Nebber you mind. You's got ter die."

"Casually speakin', we've all got a right smart chance that way. W'ot's ther use o' hur-ryin' ther obsequies? Let wal enough alone, sez I, an' not go humpin' around fer ter find Gabriel, or w'otever ther angel o' death is called, ter wit, namely."

"Talk, all talk. Is yer ready ter die?"

Bet flourished the knife again.

"Nixy—not fer Josephus! W'ot fer do you persist in harpin' on one subject fer? Le's talk about ther Board o' Aldermen, or ther last opera uproar."

"No, we won't talk no more. You made fun ob me dis mornin', an' nobody kin do dat. I's gwine ter kill ye. De men is all gone, an' I's got dis thing my own way. I'll fix ye right away!"

She advanced, and Bob saw that he was, indeed, in great danger. Her coarse, brutal features told just how little of mercy could be expected; her sinister, gloating expression told that murder was really in her heart.

Bob found himself compelled to do some quick thinking.

How was he to escape?

Black Bet was big, and as strong as a man; he could not hope to match her in a trial of strength; and, while he was wholly unarmed, she held the murderous knife. His chances seemed very poor, indeed.

Only one means of relief occurred to him, and he proceeded to put it into use. Bet had forgotten to close the door, and he suddenly fixed his gaze on that point and caused his face to brighten, as from a joyful discovery.

"Hyar, Steve—this way, quick!" he exclaimed.

The trick worked well. The negress wheeled, expecting to face her employer. She saw no one, however. She did offer the chance which Bob coveted, and he did not fail to improve it.

Stooping, so as to make his small form still smaller, he shot past the woman like a flash and made for the open door.

He was beyond her before Bet realized the danger; but, when she saw him thus shooting forward, she uttered a shrill cry.

"Stop! stop, or I'll kill ye!"

"Kill yer granddad!"

With this retort Bob shot through the door.

He had gained one point, but what lay beyond he did not know. Perhaps the next room would prove to be locked, and he would be at the mercy of the female fiend.

Her heavy steps were already heard in pursuit, and, looking back, the boy saw her rushing after him, with the glittering knife ready for work.

He made for the door.

Would it prove to be unlocked?

If it was fastened the negress would soon over-

take him, and then there seemed to be no way of escaping the deadly knife.

His hand touched the door—he tore it open—and then disappointment awaited him.

It was not locked, but he had opened the wrong door. Instead of seeing a flight of stairs which would lead him to the lower part of the house, there was nothing but a stairway which led to the floor above.

It was a most unwelcome discovery, and seemed to indicate only fresh captivity, but he was not in a situation to make elaborate choice. He must go up, and that, too, with great rapidity, or meet the negress's knife.

Perceiving this, he did not hesitate. With a defiant cry he ran up the stairs, taking two at a leap.

Bet was close behind, but she fell in the rear at this point. Her heavy body could not have been impelled two steps at a time by any power natural to her; indeed, it was as much as she could do to get up at all; she forgot this in her wrath, and made unusually good time, for she was determined that the boy should not escape.

There seemed little danger of his doing this. The upper floor looked like the garret of a farmhouse; it was unfinished, full of odds and ends, and had only one window—a small affair, which, as Bob had already learned, did not admit of escape.

He was now situated very much like a rat in a box; but his plan was already formed. A chimney passed through the middle of the room, and he thought that if he could decoy Bet behind this, in her pursuit, his chances would improve.

"Hyar I be, Lily White!" he cried, as her woolly head arose. "Look this way; only three for a quarter. Take one! See small bills for items."

"You debbil, you!" pouted Bet; "I'll have you yet!"

"W'ot'll ye hev me fur—better or wuss? Not fer Joseph! I ain't ter be decoyed like that."

He was near the chimney, trying to induce her to advance, but she stood regaining her breath and making no movement. Whether she saw the danger to her hopes of success was uncertain.

"You is a fiend!" she declared.

"See hyar, Lily, can't you git another string ter yer ole harp, or else put ther measly thing inter better tune? Grates on my ears like a rheumatic saw, b'gosh!"

Bet did not reply. Her breath was coming back, and with it all her evil passions. She still held the knife, and was resolved to use it to best advantage.

To say that Bob was indifferent to the danger would be to incorrectly express it. He and Bet had the affair to themselves. There was little hope of interruption, and whoever came would not be his friend. But there was little prospect that any one would come. In that dark, low attic, they would settle the question between them.

Would it end in a tragedy?

Assuredly it would, if the desperate woman with the knife had her way about it.

She advanced, and Bob poised himself lightly to avoid her. If he fully realized his danger he was also clear-headed, and he did not intend to be cut to pieces if he could avoid it.

Several times Bet feinted, and her movements showed Bob that she realized the danger of having the chimney utilized against her.

How could he accomplish his object?

He began to talk in that vein which past experience had shown him was so aggravating to her, and succeeded in drawing a torrent of abuse from her, but she still kept warily on the safe side of the chimney.

What was to be done?

His eyes caught sight of a slender stick, or rod, leaning against a barrel, and, though it was too small to be used for an effective blow, he thought of a way in which it might be made more useful.

Catching it up, he made a stroke at Bet's knife-hand and nearly hit it.

"Aha!" he cried, "two kin play keards at ther same time, can't they? Look out, Lily, I'm arter ye!"

He made another stroke, actually hitting her on the knuckles, and her rage seemed to run away with her. She shook the knife and swore volubly.

"I'll cut you in pieces!" she shouted.

"You won't cut nothin'," he airily replied.

"You're wuss than a lame hoss wi' a blind eye. Oh! come an' see us, Lily; sling yer bigness this way an' glad my yearnin' heart. Prance them ethereal feet o' yourn right 'round hyar. Come, sweet gazelle!"

These words, accompanied by grins and chuck-

les such as only Gamin Bob could use, took away what judgment the negress had remainin'. She forgot everything but her desire for revenge, and made a rush around the chimney.

It was the chance which Bob coveted, and he lost no time in improving it.

The way was clear to the stairs, and he shot in that direction like a young kangaroo.

"Hoop-lal! Good-day, gentle Betty! Look yer last on Bowery Bob, E-squire, ter wit, namely!"

Bet uttered a screech as she realized the danger, but he did not stop for more parleying. Reaching the top of the stairs, he bounded nimbly down, and by the time she reached the head he was in the room below.

This time he made no mistake as to the proper door. His hand touched the knob. Would it prove to be unlocked? Hurrah! yes; it turned, and he went through quickly.

"Euphrubuster! ther game o' dodge an' run goes on swimmin'. Now, ef no measly ole cook ain't down b'low, I'm all hunk, wi' a chromeo flung in."

He was soon in the lower hall. The front door was locked, but the key was in its proper place. He gave it a wrench, flung open the door and shot out. He was on the street, and the whole world was practically before him.

Bet's steps were heard behind him, and, obeying a sudden impulse, he locked the door from the outside, putting the key in his pocket, and walked swiftly down the street.

"Out o' quod, b' hokey! Casually speakin', I hev ther best o' ther job, an' I'm bettin' bullion they don't git ther grip on me ag'in. Gosh all cigar-stubs! I'll make it hot fur 'em, right away. I'll call ther p'lice—no, I won't; not fer Joseph! I'll let 'em sprawl, an' when they come mousin' 'round ag'in, I'll find out jest w'ot their raffle is. They will come; sart'in they will; an' then ther firm o' B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co., will rattle their dry bones all ter dust. Hello! who is that?"

CHAPTER IX.

BOB MEETS MRS. WELLBURN.

THE boy stopped. There was a possibility that he might be mistaken, but a second glance showed him that he was not mistaken. He hurried forward to the man's side.

"I say, Mr. Wellburn!"

The cashier, for it was, indeed, he, looked down at the diminutive figure.

"Ah! my lad, is it you?"

"Ef 'pearance ain't illusory, it's jest me—Bob o' ther Bowery, ter wit, namely."

"Upon my word, so it is. What does this mean? Where have you been, and why wasn't you at the house this morning?"

"That's right; slap 'em right in ly ther whole-sale. I sorter like big trades. Wal, sirree, I wa'n't 'round this A. M. 'cause I hed a measly diffuglety enter my hands—couldn't git away, nohow."

"How is it now?"

"I'm free ez a flea, an' ef ye ain't gi'n out that ere posish ter a better-lookin' chap, I'd jest like ter try it."

Wellburn looked sharply at Bob. His mind and eyes were clearer than on the previous night, and he was trying to read the boy. The Hotspur was doing the same thing and his theory that Wellburn was stealing the cash of the Savings Bank would have wavered but for one thing. The cashier's face was not a bad one, but he had been under the influence of liquor the night before, and, young as Bob was, he knew that liquor degrades the man who uses it, and saps his vitality.

"The last I saw of you," Wellburn said, after a pause, "you had left me to spy on the cab that was following us up-town."

"Ko-rect."

"What was your success?"

"Nothin' screamin', though if it hadn't been fer a knock-kneed, cross-eyed, measly p'liceman, I'd been all hunk, sure pop."

Bob's voice expressed great disgust.

"Tell me all that happened," Wellburn directed.

Bob obeyed, so far as the events of the stolen ride were concerned, but he did not tell how Bargrade had visited him in the morning, nor what an adventure he had since had. He was tempted to tell this, for Andrew Wellburn impressed him better than before, but he wisely governed himself by a rule which everybody ought to have pasted in his hat:

Never tell that which you doubt the wisdom of making known, until after sober second thought!

The cashier heard about the man and the woman in the carriage with evident perplexity.

"You didn't hear them speak?"

"No."

"Nor learn their names?"

"Nixy."

"I can't imagine who they were," said Wellburn, with a thoughtful frown. "A man and woman, following me at that hour of the night. I'd give a good deal to know who they were."

"Wal, I've done a right smart lot o' detective work in my day, boss—maybe you've heern tell o' ther detective firm o' B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co.—an' it's possible I kin elucidate this measly case."

"You look shrewd enough for it."

"Luck will discount shrewdness, ev'ry day, an' I'm a reg'lar Cinderella fer luck. I ain't romancin' any when I say I've did a heap o' detective work, an' I'd like a hack at them 'ere individuals."

"Perhaps I'll give you the chance, but, first of all, I want you in my house—to watch my own family!"

"Eh?"

The cashier repeated the statement.

"Strikes me that's sorter a ree-markable deal."

"It is, but I am led to it by unusual causes. Perhaps you wonder why I select you, rather than a grown person, or a regular detective—"

"Not a tall. You think nobody'd spect me o' bein' a detective," shrewdly replied Bob.

"If you can carry out your part as astutely as you have guessed it, you will do well."

"I never do wuss—not fer Joseph!"

"You may consider yourself engaged. I only hope you realize the extent to which I am trusting you."

"I should, ef I knowed yer little game," replied Bob, suggestively.

"At least you will not betray or turn against me?"

"Not fer Joseph! Hope I don't look like a traitor. D'ye observe aught in my classic featur's ter remind ye o' Judas Scar'emout? Is my name Simon Girty, white Injun, ter wit, namely? Nixey! Not much!"

This defense was made in a free, airy way, but it impressed Wellburn more than an earnest denial would have done. He had caught at Bob in a sort of desperation; if the boy served him well the whole course of his life might be changed; if he proved false, the struggle would simply be given up.

He had not arrived at the decision that a more likely-looking detective would a failure without mature thought.

All depended on the boy.

Having arrived at a decision he took him to various establishments and fitted him out with a plain, serviceable suit of clothes and other things to match, to all of which Bob graciously consented.

Several times during the tour he chuckled aloud, and Wellburn thought it was with joy at getting decent garments in place of his rags. Really, the boy was mentally inquiring:

"Wot would his nibs say ef he knowed I was a heavy depositor in his Savings Bank? Guess he'd make me buy my own purple an' fine linen."

He was finally fitted out, and then they started for the cashier's house.

"I may as well tell you," said Wellburn, "that I am not on good terms with the greater part of my family. There is no love lost between me on one side, and my wife and son, Edward, on the other. The same remark will apply to my wife's niece, Olive Pray. All are against me, and all will probably be against you."

"Wal, ef thar ain't mor'n three on 'em, I don't keer a red—not fer Joseph. One o' my forefathers—his name were Samson—once cleaned out a hull army o' claim-jumpers in a mining town called—called—I don't jest remember ther name, but he knocked 'em sick an' silly, an' then pulled down the county court-house onto 'em, b'gosh!"

Wellburn listened patiently, and then continued:

"I have one son; a boy of thirteen; whom I want you to like. He is the only one I care for, or who cares for me. He is unlike you, and not strong, but it will be your work to care for him, and I hope you will do it well."

"I'll be a granddad ter him," Bob gravely asserted.

"Above all, I want you to keep the fact that you are there for a double purpose from the other members of the family."

"You kin bet high, I will."

"Still, I want you to watch them."

"Jes' so. I will."

"That is why I put you there. There are

things transpiring in my house which are not as I would have them, and, I believe, things of which I know nothing. In fact, there are mysteries there which puzzle me. It will be your work to learn them."

Bob's eyes fairly danced.

"Now, you talk boss-sense, squire. Ef thar is any one thing I dote on, it is measly mysteries an' gallus conspiracies. I feel myself growin' fat wi' joyful anticipation, a'ready, b'gosh!"

Wellburn sighed and was silent for several seconds, after which he proceeded to give further directions. There was nothing in the state of his household affairs which pleased him as it did Bob; it was a wretched complication which he endured only for Willis's sake.

But for the boy, the unhappy cashier might before that day have sought rest from his troubles in the waters of the East river.

By the time directions were fully given they were within sight of the house, and Wellburn prepared himself for the storm he felt sure would follow his introduction of Bob to the household. He looked critically at the boy. He looked respectable and honest, but, Wellburn thought, the flavor of the street was still there, and the thin face had an expression of hawk-like keenness.

"I wish he showed his sharpness less, for she may suspect," he thought, "but the venture must be made."

Opening the door he conducted Bob to an adjacent room, and then rung for a servant and directed her to request her mistress's presence in the room.

Mrs. Wellburn soon came.

There was a hard expression on her face, as though she anticipated another war of words, but she was not prepared to see Bob, and she paused and looked at him with some wonder.

The cashier spoke quietly:

"Mrs. Wellburn, this is a boy I have engaged as companion for Willis. His name is Robert Allen."

The latter fact was news to Hotspur Bob, but he made the mental observation that it was "sorter a toney handle, an' would do fer a temporary cognomen," and he also took pains to remember it.

The lady looked at him freezingly.

"I am not sure that I understand," she replied.

"I have carried out an old idea of mine, of having a companion for Willis. The boy is gentle, weak of body and inclined to be too studious. This lad will lead his mind to more practical matters, and try to interest him in athletic pleasures."

"Do you propose to turn the house into a gymnasium?" sarcastically inquired Mrs. Wellburn.

"Very likely, one room will be thus arranged," was the quiet reply. "Neither of the boys, however, will make their sport annoying to others."

"Where did you pick up this object?"

The lady was still looking at Bob in a hostile way, but he bore scrutiny and words composedly.

"He is a poor boy whom I wish to help."

"He looks like a Bowery rough."

"Pardon me, you will find him anything else, and, I am sure, will conduct himself with good taste."

"Then his looks belie him, for he seems like a graduate of the House of Correction. Has he no tongue in his head? If so, I'd like to hear him use it. Come, boy, what have you to say for yourself?"

CHAPTER X.

THE HOTSPUR IN THE MANSION.

GAMIN BOB, thus called upon, did not show any embarrassment whatever. He raised one hand and pulled the front lock of his hair in what he thought might possibly be an aristocratic way.

"Wal, mum, I ain't overly given ter soundin' my own bazoo, but ef a 'stificate o' good ka-rakter is really necessary, I kin vouch fer myself ev'ry time. I ain't a graduate o' Yale college, nur o' Vassar; but I kin read poetry right off kerslap, ef thar ain't too many measly long words in it. Furdermore I'm a mighty personal frien' o' ther mayor, gov'nor an' Sam Baxter, who drives a boss-car on ther Bowery. I'm ther senior member o' ther firm o' B. Bowery, Stumpy & Co., peanut nabobs, an' we sell ez good an article fer ther money ez you kin find. Thar ain't no crooked stick about me, an' my name is Robert Allen—ter wit, namely, yer obedient sarvant an' feller-citizen."

This long speech flowed serenely from the boy's mouth, while Mrs. Wellburn listened in

amazement. The cashier knew that Bob's eccentricities were bound to crop out anyhow, and he let him talk.

The Bowery boy wound up by pulling his hair again.

"What in the world are you talking about?" cried Mrs. Wellburn, shocked to that painful extent usual to over-nice people.

"Ther foregoin' is a brief obituary notice o' yer subscriber, mum. I admit it is lame in fine details, but this is a small edition, anyhow, an' ther pale-face never gives ther abnormal heroics o' ther pusson up fer argyment."

"Still incomprehensible."

"Don't see why ye shouldn't ketch on, mum. It's ez plain ez ther wart on Bridget Moynahan's nose."

"Boy, your talk savors too much of low life!"

"Goshall cranberry bushes! you don't say so! I was supposin' it were multitudinously surcharged wi' ther unadulterated essence o' high-cockalorum, 'ristocratic helioglobulness. I'm right anxious to please, mum, fer I hev a widowed father an' eight small sisters who look ter me fer grub an' calico, an' I've got to fling my luffs lively. But ef I don't use words o' proper lengthitudinality, jest lemme git my chin inter the sacred precepts o' Webster's boss dictionary, an' I'll reel off words ter-morrer that'll turn ther air blue an' keep a dry-goods clerk busy all ther time measurin' them wi' a yara-stick, b'gosh!"

"Mercy! what a creature!" cried the fine lady, holding up both hands.

"That's a fact, mum, though I don't want ter brag," answered Bob, serenely.

"Mr. Wellburn, are we to have such a savage in the house?"

The speaker turned venomously upon the cashier. She did not want any boy on the premises who came as Bob seemed likely to come, and she really believed she had good grounds for requiring the casting of any one who talked as this particular boy did.

"You mistake the situation wholly," gravely returned Wellburn. "We cannot expect a poor boy wh m we employ to be like a child brought up on Murray Hill, and it is because young Robert is so different from Willis that I have employed him. He will prove a capital offset to Willis's over-studious and sensitive nature."

"This boy certainly is not sensitive!" observed Mrs. Wellburn, with fine sarcasm.

"He is polite, in his way."

"Fortune save me from seeing any one else who is polite in a similar way."

Her manner was still aggressive, but Wellburn, never losing his temper, was quietly persistent, and she really did not think best to insist on keeping Bob out.

No decision had been reached in Olive Pray's case, and, as Mrs. Wellburn did not suspect that Bob was to be introduced for a double motive, she mentally decided that it would be just as well to waive the point.

She therefore yielded with a degree of graciousness, and took her departure.

Wellburn then announced that he would show Bob his new quarters, and the latter was conducted to a small room on the third floor, which he found all that he could desire.

He was, however, anxious on one point.

"I say, mister, wot sort o' a impression d'ye s'pose I made?"

"Oh, you did well enough."

"I slung in all ther eloquence I could ketch onter in a off-hand way, but I'll do better next time or bu'st Noah Webster's dictionary all ter smesh."

"Don't worry about long words, they are of no account. Mrs. Wellburn does not use them, and it is not good taste to overburden conversation with them. Naturally, she is not greatly pleased at your coming, and will show it more or less every day, I dare say, but you have only to act your natural self and remain cool."

"Jes' so."

"Will you now see my son?"

"Sart'in'. Trot him in!"

Wellburn went out, but soon returned leading Willis.

He had already explained to the boy what the new arrival meant, and Willis was not greatly overjoyed. He cared more for books than boys. Still, it was not in his gentle nature to oppose his father's will, or to be disagreeable to any one, and he went up to Bob and held out his thin hand frankly.

"How do you do, Robert?"

"Pretty toler'ble, casually speakin'. How be you?"

"I'm as well as usual."

"Glad on't, b'gracious."

There was a brief silence, during which the boys looked at each other, and Wellburn at both of them. He could not help noticing how different they were. Both were small for their age, but, while Willis was feeble, Bob was like a particularly tough knot.

For about the first time in his life, Bob felt a little ill at ease. If Willis's body was small, his eyes were preternaturally large, and they seemed to be looking the Bowery boy through and through.

Wellburn noticed the mutual embarrassment, and was wise enough to know that the boys would get along more rapidly in acquaintanceship when alone, so he did not prolong the interview.

After some arrangements for the next day, Bob was left alone.

"Wa-al," he then muttered, "I guess I'm inter it up ter my collar-button, now. So I'm ter be companion ter that young chap! Wal, I'm gamblin' rocks he's a good little shaver—a good eal like Stumpy, only more so—but them eyes o' his'n is onnat'ral. Seems like I kin see three miles back when I look inter them. Reckon me an' he will git along like apple-pie, hows'ever. But w'ot o' ther fine madame o' this towerin' castle?"

Bob winked sagely at the gas-jet.

"She's a clipper on high-heeled shoes!"

And then he shook his head soberly and fell into deep thought.

He was by no means sure of his position at Andrew Wellburn's. His acquaintance with that man had not commenced well. He had seen him under the influence of liquor, and had jumped at the conclusion that the cashier was squandering the money of the Savings Bank.

Now, however, he was in Wellburn's employ, and found himself rather liking the man in spite of all. There seemed some danger that he would lose sight of his resolution to investigate the suspected bank defalcation, and thereby lose his own deposit.

"But I won't!" he declared. "It would be a fool-job ef I let them millions o' mine slip away when I see'd 'em a-bein' drawed out o' their nest. I won't do it; not fer Joseph. No, sirree; I'll work my own case while a-workin' Andrew's. Wonder w'ot he expects me ter Parn in this p'latial abode o' wealth?"

This was a question he could not answer, but what he had already seen, taken in connection with what the cashier had previously said, was enough to show that harmony was not one of the distinguishing traits of the Wellburn household.

"W'otever 'tis, I'm sure ter git at it. I hev a nat'ral taste fer dissectin' measly mysteries, an' I'm goin' ter run this 'un down like a dog does a rabbit, b'gosh!"

With this resolution the Bowery boy went to bed.

He slept well, but found the family hour so late for rising that he had a good appetite by the time he had means of satisfying it.

He ate with three servants, who were at first inclined to view him scornfully, but his good humor soon made an impression, and a smart little chambermaid in a smart white cap seemed actually smitten with him.

Mr. Wellburn brought Bob and Willis together again, and then left them and went to his daily labor.

Willis looked at Bob with a faint smile.

"What shall we do first?"

Bob scratched his head.

"Wal, I dunno, jestly, but ef I's ter git up a muskel fer you, I'd suggest that ye begin by chuckin' a barrel o' flour over yer head."

"Not with the flour in it?"

"Why, cert!"

"But I can't even lift it."

"No? Wal, mebbe it'd be ez wal ter begin by chuckin' ther flour inter yer stomach in job lots. Ef we must hev some 'musement, s'pose we read Shakespeare in ther original Greek."

"Read what?"

"Bill Shakespeare."

"He wasn't a Greek."

"Not by birth, I admit," replied Bob, with a wave of his hand. "He was born in Arizona, whar his dad went ter dig gold; but when ther poet got big enough ter work, ther minin' biz was all Greek ter him, an' that's how he come ter write Macbeth, Yankee Doodle an' Shoo Fly in ther Greek langwidge."

"I thought he was an Englishman," said Willis, his big eyes larger than ever.

"His mother were a Englishman, but his father was born right in ther Bowery, o' Russian pedigree. Oh, I'm wal up in Shakespeare; his son an' me has played togetther down in Crosby street many times."

"But it can't be the same Shakespeare who wrote the poems," expostulated the wondering Willis; but, before more could be said, the door opened and a young man of twenty-one entered.

He scarcely noticed Willis, but looked at Bob.

"Hello, youngster!"

"Hello, oldster!" Bob coolly returned.

"What's that you call me?"

"I seldom peddle my cabbages twice, an' I reckon yer ears took in ther drift o' my remarks."

"None of your impudence here!" said the young fellow, with a scowl.

"This is my brother Edward," explained Willis quickly, for he scented trouble.

"Wal, I ain't hired ter amoose him, Bob observed, with his usual serenity.

"So this is the chap the old man has brought in," Edward said, placing his arms akimbo.

"Upon my word, Willis, I think you'll soon be a Solomon under his tuition."

"Never'd do ter hev two Solomon's in ther same fambly," Bob coolly observed.

"Do you mean that for me?"

"What?"

"Your slur."

"Dunno w'ot you're talkin' about. Please come down ter U. S. lingo, ef yer want me ter ketch on."

"You're a blockhead!"

"Took a blockhead ter diskiver it!"

"See here, you young scoundrel, you want to go slow, or I'll mash you all to pieces!"

And, much to Willis's alarm, Edward shook his fist belligerently at the personal friend of the Shakespeares.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BADGER CONTINUES WORK.

MATTERS began to look favorable for a row, but Bob luckily remembered that he was expected to keep the peace, and, without bending his dignity, so turned his conversation that he succeeded in soothing Edward's wounded feelings.

He soon left the room, and Bob and Willis were again left alone. Several chapters might be written on the events of the day, during which Willis's simple ingenuousness and the worldly wisdom and bantering style of the Bowery boy stood out in sharp relief.

Despite this radical difference in their natures, they progressed very well, and a friendship actually sprung up between them—something that was the more natural to Bob, because the other boy so often reminded him of Stumpy.

When Mr. Wellburn returned at night, he found matters in much better condition than he had expected. Mrs. Wellburn had no complaint to make against Bob, and Edward actually spoke well of him. As for Willis, he earnestly requested that his new companion might stay all the time with him.

During the evening, Bob paid a brief visit to Stumpy and the Crosby street home, and astonished his partner in the peanut business by describing the glories of his new place of residence.

While at the latter place, the young detective had kept his eyes open as directed, especially during those periods when Willis was busy over his books, but he saw nothing worth reporting to the cashier.

He had twice happened upon Olive Pray, but she deigned him only a glance and went her way. Bob desired no more; he did not like her appearance, and wanted none of her friendship.

During the forenoon of the second day, however, he was witness to an interesting scene in which she figured.

Willis was busy with his books, Edward had gone out on some sort of a trip, and Bob was trying to kill time somehow—for the inactive life he was leading had already begun to trouble him.

He had visited the library and looked over some of the books, and had just reached the top of the stairs again when the door-bell rung.

He paused to see who the applicant was.

One of the servants was hastening to the door, but Miss Pray suddenly came out of the parlor and stopped her.

"I will attend to it, Susan," she said.

Susan looked surprised, but submitted without argument and disappeared.

Miss Pray opened the door and a man entered. So far all was tame enough, but when Bob saw the new-comer take Olive in his arms and kiss her, the boy's eyes opened somewhat wider.

"Gosh all rat-traps! he's done plucked ther dew off'n her lips, an' 'tain't Ed'ard, either. Reckon ez how that pugilistic young screamer

would walk all over t'other chap ef he see'd—Hello!"

Bob's face assumed a blank look. The new-comer had finished his loving salute to Miss Pray, and as he raised his head his face was exposed to view. No wonder the Bowery boy was surprised. The face was a familiar one to him; he had seen it before.

The new-comer was Bargrade, "the tall man." "Jemima K. Johnsing! is it him? Reckon he's found out whar Andrew herds 'thout my help. Won't want ter hire me now, ez much ez he did—not fer Joseph! Jes' my measly luck; I always had a way o' gittin' sot on an' squashed."

Olive and Bargrade turned and entered the parlor, while Bob scratched his head and looked after them.

"Now, thar is somethin' odd about all this. Ef ther tall chap didn't know nothin' about Andrew, an' wanted p'int's, it strikes me he's got on kissin' terms wi' ther cosses lamb o' ther flock in a mighty short time. Hol' on, B. Bowery, E-squire! Thar is more ter this riddle than is guessed at in yer simple feel-osophy, ez Mr. Shakespeare would say. Jes' so; jes' so! I begin ter see."

He cast a wistful gaze toward the parlor.

"Wonder ef I kin eavesdroop thar?"

It was a risky piece of business, and he knew it. True, Mr. Wellburn had especially directed that he should listen in such cases, if possible, but the opening of a door by a servant—and he could hear them just beyond the hall—would betray him irrevocably.

His work at Wellburn's would thus be ended almost before begun.

"I've got ter risk it, anyhow."

And he determined to risk it.

This decision made, he went noiselessly down the stairs and approached the parlor door. Would he be able to overhear anything there? He was not sure, but hoped for the best, and put his ear close to the keyhole. Almost immediately he heard distinct words in Bargrade's voice:

"Do you anticipate further trouble?"

"No," replied Olive.

"He's an obstinate fellow."

"Yes, but we hold the reins over his back."

"I am rather sorry that Dorcas spoke thus to him."

"Well, he may as well know the truth now as ever."

"Since then he has said nothing?"

"Not a word."

"Well, he's probably made up his mind to let you stay."

"You bet he has," rather inelegantly replied Miss Olive.

"And the cub?"

"He's as stupid as ever."

"Thinks you love him?"

"Yes."

"He's a fool!"

"Of course he is, but he's a useful one. He's like a blind horse; makes a good many clumsy steps, but, if the bit is kept right in his mouth, and one gives the reins a jerk now and then, he'll ante up like a 2:10 nag."

Bowery Bob checked an inclination to whistle. "Gosh all Tam O'Shanter! is that ther meek and lowly Miss O. Pray? She slings off slang in a way fit ter make a youth like me blush purple."

"I'm not sure but he will make trouble," Bargrade thoughtfully said.

"How?"

"He has a temper as angelic as your own—begging your pardon, Olive—and he may act rusty when he finds he is thrown over."

"Nonsense! I'm not afraid of him. He is more growl than bite. But I think aunt Dorcas is now ready to see you, and we will go up."

These words, accompanied by the rustle of her dress, gave warning to Bob, who promptly slipped up-stairs and out of sight.

Olive and her visitor followed in his footsteps, and then entered Mrs. Wellburn's rooms; but a judicious locking of doors shut the Bowery boy from all chance of observation and hearing.

Convinced of this after vainly trying to penetrate to the charmed regions, he began meditating on what he had already overheard.

"Wal, there is somethin' to be heard in this p'latial abode! Seems that Miss O. Pray ain't half so much in love with Ed'ard ez that chap thinks. Calls him a sore-headed cub, or words ter effect, she does. Now, that don't show proper respect fer her sweetheart—not fer Joseph! But w'ot did ther rest o' the chin-chin refer to?"

Bob meditated duly on this point before deciding.

"Seems that somebody wanted fer ter chuck ther lamb-like an' do-cile Miss O. Pray out."

That must 'a' been Andrew, ter wit, namely, an', now I think on't, he said ez much. Wal, why didn't he? 'Cause Dorcas spoke right out in ther synagogue. Who's Dorcas? Andrew's wife, o' course. But w'ot did she shout in Andrew's ear that knocked him sick?"

Here was a knotty point, but Bob went at it in an analytical style, and his face soon brightened.

"W'ot could she shout?" he continued. "Wal, ef Andrew is robbin' ther Bonanza Savings Bank, an' Dorcas knows it, she would only hev ter say so, an' she'd make him ez sick ez a cow with a ringbone. That's it, bet a cent!"

Bob hung around and thought for some time longer; but, as there seemed no chance that he would overhear more, finally decided on a new point.

Taking his cap he went outside, and, at a convenient point, waited for Bargrade to reappear.

At the end of half an hour his patience was rewarded; Bargrade came out, and, after a look about the vicinity, made his way to a car bound down-town and took passage.

Bob promptly boarded that just behind.

There was one thing about him in the pursuit: unless his new clothes proved a disguise, Bargrade would recognize him, and this he wished to avoid.

He therefore kept out of sight as far as possible.

Bargrade rode to the head of the Bowery and several streets beyond, and then alighted, took a cross street and walked toward Broadway. He did not seem to fear pursuit, and did not once look behind, so Bob had no trouble in following.

Reaching Gotham's main thoroughfare, Bargrade walked south until he came to a saloon. This he entered. Bob knew the place of old. It was not one of the best; indeed, he had heard it said that hard crowds assembled there nightly, and "made night hideous."

As everything was quiet then, he promptly followed his quarry.

The saloon had a wide sweep toward the rear, and was fitted up with tropical plants and statues, among which was a variety of tables, and at one of these Mr. Bargrade was already seated.

He was not alone.

Another man had plainly been waiting for him, for the two had just shaken hands.

Bob's quick eyes took in the situation, and he saw that he had a good chance to get near enough to overhear what they said, screening himself behind one of the statues.

He ordered a glass of sarsaparilla, and then moved toward the seat he had selected.

Bargrade and the other man were by this time talking earnestly, and the Bowery boy expected something of importance.

His movements brought him where he could see the second man's face, and, as he saw it fairly, he came to a halt through genuine surprise.

CHAPTER XII.

DAINGEROUS DRINK.

No wonder Bob was surprised.

He recognized the second man as Mr. Zadok Playfair, President of the Bonanza Savings Bank, and knew that his presence there meant a good deal. Bargrade, as he had already learned, was spying on the cashier of the bank, and trying to learn all about him, and here he was, after a visit to Wellburn's house, immediately in conference with the president.

"B'gosh!" was Bob's first thought, "ef thar ain't a breeze risin' 'round Andrew's head, I'm a promiscuous liar, I be. He's been a-walkin' in dark an' devious ways, an' ther hull b'ilin' on 'em is onter his racket. No wonder he wants a helper—b'gosh! he orter hev a guarden!"

With these ideas in his mind he made his way to a seat, and then began sipping his sarsaparilla.

Mr. Playfair was speaking, and his words were distinctly audible to the boy.

"And you still lack a clew?"

"I do."

"What is your theory?"

"Well, I think Wellburn is a mighty shrewd chap, and he is working some big game."

"You still reject the gambling theory?"

"Yes."

"I don't."

"I know him better than you, old man. Fact is, he is the stupidest man at all games that I ever saw. He gamble! not much."

"Then what the dickens is he driving at?"

Mr. Playfair asked, with a frown.

"Now, you have me."

"Can it be he is less of a fool than we take him to be?"

"Bah! He hasn't the grit of a louse. Dorcas rules him with a fine Italian hand, and so may any one rule him. Do you suppose that, if he had common pluck, he would have been content to remain so long in the bank, under the conditions he has endured?"

Playfair did not answer. He sat smoking thoughtfully for several seconds, and then broke out:

"Hang it! I don't like the situation at all. Wellburn could undoubtedly make it warm for us if he tried, and this last thing we have tumbled to looks bad, I must say. Confound it, man, we must have a regular detective on his track, if you can't find out what's in the wind."

"I wouldn't trust a regular detective."

"Bah! there are men in New York, in the business, who can be bought for a song. Pay them well, and they will wink at a robbery or murder."

A conversation of several minutes followed in regard to this matter, but Hotspur Bob did not hear it. His sarsaparilla was drunk, and he was asleep. Slowly, undetected by him, irresistible, anyway, a lethargy had stolen upon him, unlike common sleep, yet more powerful.

Unconscious of everything, he now sat in his chair and, basking heavily, was off the trail he had followed, and in great danger.

One of the barkeepers approached and shook him.

He did not stir.

Then the man picked him up lightly, for the boy was not heavy, and carried him toward a door a few steps away. Opening this, a small room was revealed in which were several chairs, a table and a sofa. He laid Bob down on this, and then stood erect, smiling.

He was an evil looking fellow, though well-dressed, and nobody knew better than he why the Bowery boy slept so soundly.

At one side of the room was a telephone attachment, and he went to this and sounded a call. An answer was soon returned. The following conversation then took place:

"Are you there, Steve?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"The boy is here."

"What boy?"

"Don't you know?"

"Do you mean the one who got away from Bet?"

"Yes."

"By George! that so? Keep him, sure!"

"I will. He's taken some of the stuff, and is good for a sleep of some hours. You must attend to the rest, and get him away before night. Can't have him here then, or there may be trouble."

"All right. Ben and I'll be over and fix him."

"Say, there's somebody else here."

"Who?"

"The tall man."

"The deuce he is! Is he drugged?"

"No, and I don't dare try it. There's another bloke with him who's a nabob. It won't do to touch him."

"We must know who he is, anyhow!"

"Send Ben over as quick as you can, and let him dog the bloke when he goes out."

"All right. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Good-day."

Conversation ceased, and the man, after another glance at Bob, went out and locked the door behind him, putting the key in his pocket.

He had scarcely done this when the Bowery boy stirred, rubbed his eyes, sat up and again rubbed his eyes. He had the appearance of one just aroused from sound sleep, and a dimness of vision was accompanied by a severe headache.

"Gosh all pertater-bugs! w'ot sort o' a measly scrape is this! Appearantly I've got in over my collar-button! Been drugged by that gallus crook, sure ez red hair an' onion-seeds. Lucky I wasn't exsassinated. Terrible risk I've run—worse than playin' football wi' dynamite. Hello, you!"

This salutation was addressed to the telephone attachment, which he then viewed critically.

"You're a daisy, you be! You've helped me ter an extensive acquaintance wi' ther measly sharks. So ther bleary-eyed inebriate who p'isoned me is an ally o' ther chap who left me alone with gentle Bet, ther full-proof brunette belle! Jes' sol! This hyar is o' vital interest, as ther drunken man said ter ther poor whisky."

Bob arose to his feet and shook himself.

Luck had so far been in his favor to a degree.

He had drank only a part of his sarsaparilla, because he noticed an unpleasant flavor about it, and had thrown the rest in the cuspidor.

What he had taken had been enough to put him to sleep for a few minutes, though he had known perfectly well when the bar-keeper was fumbling over him in his chair. He lacked the power or will to try and say anything, and lay passive while being brought to the small room.

He had, however, heard the telephone talk, and had aroused as soon as left alone.

He now looked out of the window, and saw that it opened on a court from which he believed escape would be easy. He saw that he could reach the court; but the sight of a paper on the table led him to pick it up with a definite purpose in view.

"Rum-shop newspapers usually hez ther subscriber's name on 'em, an' mebbe—Yas, hyar 'tis—Rellix. Jes' so. It seems that ther gentle Steve runs this place; but whar is his caboose from which he telephoned?"

The table had a drawer, and Bob mechanically pulled it out. As he did so a pile of business cards in one corner attracted his attention. He picked up one and read as follows:

"SURE-REST RESORT,

"Broadway and ——— S. R. etc."

"Choice Wines and Liquors. Peace and no interference."

"COME ALL!"

"No. — Broadway,

STEPHEN K. RELIX."

"No. — Grand street,

A subdued whistle fell from Bob's lips.

"Wal, I should smile! Reckon I ketch onter that, like a red-nosed politician ter a 'ball.' No. — Grand street is ther gamblin' 'stallishment from which Andrew, who is surnamed Wellburn, came t'other night when he was in sech a beastly condition. Jes' so; an' it seems that Steve runs ther place. Didn't know that afore. Wal, I begin ter hev a faint idee o' ther whys an' wherfores o' this complicated complication."

He stowed the card away in his pocket, and then unfastened the window and lowered himself to the court.

From there he easily gained the street, and was soon partially concealed in a deep doorway.

It was now his intention to watch further developments, and he believed he would see something of importance. Certainly, there would be commotion in the hearts of Rellix and his tools when it was known that their prisoner had escaped; but Bob's mind was chiefly on Mr. Zadok Playfair and Bargrade.

His opinion of the President of the Bonanza Savings Bank had received a severe blow, and he suspected more than he knew.

Playfair's conversation with Bargrade had revealed the fact that both were against Andrew Wellburn, while it had done nothing to decrease the boy's opinion of the cashier. True, the latter was suspected of drinking and gambling, but Bob had suspected that before.

But the talk of the two men had led Bob to suspect that Wellburn was more sinned against than sinning; that he had been made the cat's-paw, or something of the sort, of bolder scamps, chief of whom was, as the Bowery boy would have expressed it, "Zadok Playfair, ter wit, namely."

Otherwise, why had the president said:

"Wellburn could make it warm for us if he tried."

"I've got a foul o' a gallus skeem, ez sure ez ther youth o' eggs is brief an' fleetin'. Jes' w'ot I hanker fer, an' I'm goin' fer clear up ther hull thing or t'ar my east boot-heel off, b'gosh!"

The young detective kept his place resolutely, and, at the end of half an hour, was interested to observe the arrival of one of the men who had before captured him—Rellix's assistant, Ben.

He lost no time on him, however, for Rellix & Co.'s standing was pretty well settled in his mind, but, when he saw Playfair and Bargrade come out a moment later, he was at once on the alert.

"Now, then, we'll shuffle ther keards an' bev a new hand all 'round, an' I'm a measly, bleary-eyed, defunct statoo ef I don't run 'em ter ther holes!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB BEARDS THE LIONS.

THE two men hesitated when they reached the sidewalk, and looked up and down the street as though in search of a carriage. Street cars

did not then run on Broadway, and the sight of a creeping omnibus did not prove very refreshing. So they turned and walked up the street.

Bob glanced back at the saloon. There was yet no sign that his escape had been discovered, and it occurred to him that the wisest thing he could do was to get away before the discovery was made.

Playfair and Bargrade walked on, talking earnestly, and Bob used the other sidewalk and kept them ever in sight. He would gladly have fallen in behind them and listened to what they were saying, but this was out of the question.

He followed patiently at a distance.

They reached Union Square, crossed it and went as far as Fourth Avenue and Nineteenth street. There they turned to the right, but, in a few moments, paused before the door of a respectable-looking house.

Bargrade produced a key, unlocked the door, and they entered.

Bob ran lightly up the steps and read the name on the door-plate.

"Brackett."

A broad smile brightened the detective's face; he believed he had learned Bargrade's true name. Certainly, the man had entered like one at home.

At this point the Bowery boy hesitated for a moment. A bold scheme was in his mind, but there was so much uncertainty as to how it would result that he was uncertain whether to try it.

"B'gosh, I will! Ther heavens can't no more'n fall, an' I'll be hung fer a sheep ef I'm nutton a tail. I won't take no lamb in mine—not fer Joseph!"

He rung the door-bell boldly.

There was a brief delay, and then it was opened by a female servant who had the general appearance of having gone to seed. Her slippers were down at the heel, and she seemed down at the heel generally.

"Good-afternoon," said Bob, genially. "Will yer say ter ther boss that I'm hyar?"

The servant looked dubious.

"I'm not sure that he wants to see you."

"I be. Jest salaam inter his august presence an' say that I'm hyar fer ter see him—me, Bob Bunker, ter wit, namely, ther licensed bazooist o' Gotham. Wait; now I think on't, you needn't announce me. I'll walk in!"

And he did so.

"Hold on!" cried the servant.

"Don't see nothin' fer ter hol' onter. Le's skip ther ceremony, an' jest you waltz out ther ole man. Say that one o' his business agents is here ter—Hello! hyar his nibs is now!"

Bargrade had come out of an adjoining room.

"What's all this row?" he sharply demanded.

"Nothin', yer royal nibs," coolly replied Bob, "except a slight diff o' opinion atween me an' this Circassian beauty."

"Who are you?"

"Who be I? Wal, you orter know."

"Ha! so I do! It's young Bob—the dim light bothered me. Have you come with news?"

"I hev, sart'in sure."

"Then come in here and tell it. Wait! Stay here a few moments, and then I'll call you in."

He disappeared in the room from which he had come, and Bob suspected that Zadok Playfair was there, and Bargrade had gone to get him out of sight.

Bargrade! Was that his name, or was it that on the door-plate? It occurred to the detective that this was a good time to test the matter.

"Has Mr. Brackett got company inter thar?" he asked, of the down-at-the-heel servant.

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Don't know; the master called him Zad."

Bob felt like chuckling. Playfair was not "Brackett," so Bargrade must be. He had scored one point, and, when he looked up the Brackett's genealogy, he might score another.

The master of the house reappeared and told him to enter the room. He did so and found himself in the parlor. No third party was visible, but Bob saw a wavering of the curtains at the window and suspected that Mr. Zadok Playfair was not far away.

"Sit down!" said Bargrade, cordially. "I've been wondering what had become of you."

"I've been a-ketchin' on."

"On to what?"

"I'int!"

"In regard to the drunken man?"

"Andrew Wellburn, ter wit, namely. Jes' so!"

"We did mention his name, I remember."

"Jes' so, an' we will mention whar he lives, of ye banker fer that gleam o' radiance."

"Never mind; what I want is to know where

the old man had been that night, and I trust that you are prepared to enlighten me."

"Mister," the Bowery boy solemnly said, "would ye ever s'pose that Andrew was given ter dark an' devious ways?"

"Is he?"

"Casually speakin', darker'n a black hair in ther butter. I'm inclined ter believe that Andrew is a measly, gallus ole desperado, b'gosh!"

"Well, never mind. Tell me what you've discovered."

This was easier requested than done, for Bob had no idea what kind of a charge he was to make against Mr. Wellburn, but he must necessarily make some, and he relied on a lively imagination to help him out.

"Boss, that Circassian beauty ain't listenin', is she?" the boy asked, in a stage whisper.

"No. Go on!"

"Wal, then, Andrew is a measly counterfeiter!"

"A counterfeiter?" exclaimed Bargrade, with a start.

"Jes' so!"

"How do you know?"

Here was a poser. This part of Bob's little romance was not arranged in the least degree, and he belabored his wits to get up an explanation which would not only be off-band but plausible.

"I've see'd him wi' his birds o' a feather, which is pooty fair proof, fer men don't consort wi' counterfeiter's fer no honest purpose—not fer Joseph! But thar's more."

"What is it?"

Sure enough, what was it? Bob did not know, yet he must explain. He remembered that, on a previous occasion, he had directed Bargrade's suspicions to the saloon near where he had first seen Wellburn—that of Den Magee—and he thought Den might as well stand the pressure now.

"I know their crib."

"Ha! Where is it?"

"Casually speakin', ther information seems wuth a few dew-cats, ez ther poet sez, don't it?"

"What is your price?"

"How would a ten-spot hit yer up?"

"I'd give it, but I haven't that amount of ready money in the house."

There was another rustle of the curtains, and then the President of the Bonanza Savings Bank stepped into sight.

"I'll give the money," he said.

Bob looked at him with pretended surprise.

"Don't know whether you will, or not. Wot sort o' a trap fer my unwary cowhide boots is this? Mr. Bargrade, Esquire, is this ther way ye use a gentleman? D'ye keep other blokes on draught? Any more on 'em anywhar? Is ther sof' stuffed wi' 'em? Do I see one danglin' from ther chandelier? Develop ther hull outfit, ole man, an' let me see how much it'll take ter pension 'em off. Trot out ycr relics of 1812. Waltz in yer armless men, an' yer legless men, an' yer headless men, an'—"

"Hold on!—hold on!" cried Bargrade. "Do, for heaven's sake, give me a chance to edge in a word. You need not be afraid of this gentleman. He is my superior in this affair and, really, your employer."

"Oh! Why ther howlin' dervish didn't yer say so? How was I ter know it? Pard," to Playfair, "I'm right proud an' happy fer ter see yer. Put it thar, b' hookey."

It was not an over-clean hand which Bob extended, but Mr. Zadok Playfair could not afford to be over-nice just then, and he gave his own with as good grace as possible.

"Kerrect fer you, mister: I see you're one o' ther white hen's chickens. No fuss an' feather 'bout yer, but reg'lar Bowery free-an'-easy sociability."

"I take it you're a Bowery boy."

"Bet yer porous plaster, I be. Ask Tim O'Hern, Andy Finnegan, or Slippery Sam."

Bob assumed a lawless air, to give the men the idea that he was a tough citizen, generally.

"No great amount of nonsense about you, either, eh?"

"Not a bit. I'm a dynamiter, socialibest an' free-thinker ginerally."

"I hope you haven't too much conscience?"

"Conscience? Wot is that? We don't deal in ther article along the Bowery—not fer Joseph!"

And Bob puffed out his cheeks and looked like an Italian bandit on the war-path.

"You talk like a sensible lad, and I'm glad to know you. So you have information which you think worth ten dollars?"

"Jes' so."

"Here is the money."

Playfair extended a bank-note, which the

young detective composedly stowed away in his pocket.

"You're a boss man ter deal wi', an' you'll find me right on deck ev'ry day in ther week. Whar is ther resort o' ther counterfeiter's?"

"That's the question."

"Wal, it's over Den Magee's."

"Magee's? That's the place you said Wellburn came from, that nigt," interrupted Bargrade.

"Casually speakin', you're enter it solid."

"But how do you know counterfeiting is done there, and that Wellburn has a hand in it?"

"'Cause counterfeiter's go thar, an' Wellburn mixes wi' 'em, an' thar is lights thar at all hours o' ther night, an' I twigged one o' ther gang passin' ther queer in a boozin' place on ther Bowery, and severial other reasons."

"I think the boy is right," said Playfair.

"You kin bet yer tin on it, boss."

"I don't know why Wellburn should be fool enough to go into that business," Bargrade observed.

Playfair gave him a warning look.

"We can't account for anybody's slips nowadays," he said, with a mournful shake of his head.

Both men then questioned Bob further, but the boy did not consider it advisable to know too much, and they got no more points of real or supposed value.

They then held a secret consultation, during which Bob made himself at home. He suspected that they were considering his reliability, and would have some other work for him to do if their verdict was favorable; so he waited patiently.

He had fully made up his mind that, whatever might be Andrew Wellburn's weaknesses, he was not as bad as Playfair, and intended to cast his fortunes with the cashier decidedly.

"Somebody about ther Savin's Bank is crooked, though," he thought, "an' ez my bullion is banked thar, I'm goin' in fur an overhaulin' o' dead timber. Never'll do fer ter bev ther crooks skip ter Canada with ther lucre—not fer Joseph!"

He had heard the door-bell ring while sitting there, but gave little attention to it until the door was suddenly pushed open and somebody entered.

Then he found himself interested at once.

The new-comer was Bet, the negress, and ally of Steve Relix, and her ferocious gaze was fixed full on Bob.

"Ha!" she cried, "I's got you at last, you debbil, an' now I'll cut you all in inch pieces!" and she flourished a knife in the air.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOTSPUR "KETCHES ON."

THE young detective was very much surprised, for he would as soon have thought of seeing the queen of England in the room, but there was no mistake about it.

There was Bet, big and ugly, and the expression on her face indicated that she would do all that she threatened if she could. She gave the knife another sweep and started forward, but Bob promptly dodged behind the center-table.

"Cheese it, Lily White!" he coolly exclaimed. "This 'ere ain't no gory slaughter-house, an' you'd better keep yer distance. Put up that measly ole choppin'-knife, an' act like a sensible gal!"

Bargrade had evidently been very much surprised by the new-arrival, but he now recovered his speech.

"Good heavens! we have a lunatic here!"

As he spoke Bet made a rush for the Hotspur, but he dodged nimbly around the table.

"Whoop 'em up, Lily White! I'm at home an' lookin' at yer. Come an' see me! Let ther blind mule bray! Hello! don't lose ther pieces!"

For Bet, in her headlong haste, had failed to notice the piano-stool, and she now went over it about as gracefully as a cow, sprawling over the floor, while her knife flew from her hand and fell at Bob's feet.

He picked it up and threw it in the corner behind the sofa, just in time to escape her notice as she arose.

He did not escape her notice, however, and her gaze was full of ferocity; but she came to a sudden halt and stood staring blankly. Her gaze was on Zadok Playfair's face now, and Bob saw with some wonder that the bank president looked embarrassed and alarmed.

"Wh-wh-what?" stammered Bet.

Nobody answered her, and she added:

"'Clare ter gracious! I didn't know you was hyar."

"Be silent!" said Playfair, hissing. "Keep a close tongue in your head, or it'll be the worse for you."

"It seems that you know the creature, Zad," put in Bargrade, sulkily. "If so, I wish you'd muzzle her. We want no lunatics here."

"I—I have seen her."

"Order her out then."

Bet suddenly aroused. Her abundant nerve could not long be dashed, and she pointed one finger at Bob o' the Bowery.

"Give me him an' I'll go. I's done follered him hyar, an' I wants a hack at him. He's a debbil, he is."

She wound up by shaking her fist at the young detective, but Playfair took her resolutely by the arm.

"Come with me!" he said, authoritatively. "We want no such work here; as for the boy, he's a friend of mine. Let me talk with you."

He pushed her toward the hall, and she went reluctantly. Playfair's influence over her was surprising. Bargrade began picking up the piano-stool and other scattered things, while Bob got as near the hall door as he dared and listened eagerly.

The bank president was speaking.

"This is sheer madness. Will you let any such foolish quarrel as this ruin all? We shall be ready to sail in a week, and if you want to go with us, you must be mighty careful now."

"But de young debbil abused me," grumbled Bet.

"What if he did? Sink the small affair, and get away from here as soon as possible. There's a man in there whom I'm hoodwinking, and it's poor policy for us to gabble here. Will you go?"

"Yas, I will, but you's must be sure an' tek me when you sail."

"I will, never fear. Mrs. Playfair has promised."

"Has you got de bank cleaned out, honey—"

"Sh! Silence, fool, and get away from here!"

He pushed her toward the door, and, in a few seconds, had her outside, and the door reclosed. The down-at-the-beel servant, who had admitted her, had beat a frightened retreat, and they seemed to have the scene to themselves.

When he re-entered the parlor, Bob was sitting on the sofa, safely whistling, and the boy seemed as innocent as Bargrade really was. Had Mr. Playfair known, however, that Bob had heard all that was said, he might not have been so easily satisfied.

He told a plausible story about Bet, saying she had once been employed by his wife, and then the subject was dropped.

They tried to resume where the negress had interrupted them, and Bob was duly engaged at good salary to watch Wellburn and see what could be learned definitely against him, but Zadok no longer showed the interest that he did before.

The young detective, however, was eager "fer a chance to scoop in some bullion," and a bargain was duly made.

He carried on his pretense of being a hard young fellow, and neither man suspected the part he was playing.

The interview lasted half an hour longer, and then Bob was dismissed with the injunction to report often to Bargrade, who confessed that his real name was Brackett.

By that name we will henceforth call him.

When Bob went out he fully expected to find Bet in wait for him, but she was nowhere visible. He sought the nearest restaurant and had dinner, and then, finding that he had not time to see Andrew Wellburn at the bank, decided to return to the house at once.

He had already been gone a long time.

As he went he was busy thinking over his new discoveries.

"I opine I've got ther hull thing down putty fine—all but ther secret o' Andrew's circumnavigations. Roast me fer a boss-chestnut ef I understand his riddle. Either he's guilty or he ain't. Which is it? Ef he didn't git full an' gamble, I'd bet my patent pumps on him, but I'm afeerd he's a tough ole chap. They be, anyhow. Playfair don't play fair—not fer Joseph! He's a measly ole shark, an' he's a stealin' ther shekels right out o' ther bank. Yes, sirree, an' my deposit is in vital danger o' bein' snatched bald-headed."

Bob caressed his own head, as though to make sure he was not undergoing the same fate.

"Zadok hez got it all cut-an'-dried, he sez; an' a nice little scheme 'tis; but I ketches on like a bulldog ter a coat-tail. He's drawed all ther money from the bank he kin, an' now he proposes to take his family, an' ther bullion, an' ship fer Europe. Jes' so; jes' so! Mebbe he'll do it; but crooks sometimes proposes, an' detec-

tives disposes. Ef Zadok gits across the big drink my name ain't Bob, ter wit, namely!"

By this time the speaker had reached Wellburn's house, and he entered quietly.

Nobody commented on his long absence, though Willis looked wonderingly at him.

"B'gosh!" thought the Bowery boy, "I ain't did my duty by this little chap. I'll a'tend ter it right off. I say, Will," he added, aloud, "s'pose we talk about Plato?"

"About Plato?" wonderingly repeated William.

"Jes' so."

"What about him?"

"Wot's yer opinion o' ther feller?"

"I really don't know, Robert."

"Ain't ye ever been ter his ole home in Yonkers?"

"In Yonkers? Why, Plato was an old Greek."

"Jes' so, an' he was ther best man in ther club. He'd make more home-run licks than any other two men in ther measly nine, an' he kivered first bag like a good 'un. Gracious! how he'd pick up a daisy-cutter!"

Bob nodded and smiled with the air of one who is thoroughly at home with his subject, but Willis's wonder did not abate.

"You don't mean the same man as I do, Robert. The original Plato did not play baseball. He was an old Greek philosopher, an'—"

"Jes' so; same man. Yas, he was a philosopher—considerably so. 'Member seein' his club licked by ther Nonesech Club, o' Bohoken, in 1880, by a score o' fifteen ter three. Did Plato git down in ther chops? Not fer Joseph! He jest took a chew o' the weed, an' sez he, sez Plato: 'Ef we'd played eighteen innings, we'd hev licked yer all ter pieces.' Yas, he was a philosopher."

"Yes, but, Robert, the great Plato lived and died over two thousand years ago. My books say so."

Bob looked a little puzzled, and scratched his head.

"That so? Wal, mebbe ther chap I refer to wos his son. Now I think on't his name wos Peter Plato, Jr. Yas, he were prob'ly your Plato's son."

"But I said that the great Plato died two thousand years ago. He couldn't have a son living," Willis persisted.

"I dunno 'bout that. Pete Plato, Jr., looks sorter old. He's lost a tooth, an' most o' his ha'r— Hello! hyar is ther boss!"

"The boss" was Andrew Wellburn, who had entered just in time to interrupt this thrilling conversation. He took no notice of what little he had heard said, but spoke kindly to both boys and then began talking with Willis.

Bob, however, felt that time ought not to be wasted thus, and he seized the first chance to intimate to Mr. Wellburn that he would like to see him alone. The cashier took the hint, and, arranging it quickly, soon had the Bowery boy closeted with him in his private room.

"Now, then, my lad, what is it?"

"It's a beast of a scheme."

"So you've discovered something?" said Wellburn eagerly.

"Yes, but not in this house."

"Where, then?"

"Andrew, 'low me ter ask you a solemn interrog."

"Go on! speak freely."

Wellburn gave the permission after a moment's hesitation, during which he scanned the young detective's face closely. He would have hesitated longer had he known all the facts of the case.

Other ears were so situated that they were likely to overhear all that was said. Just outside the door some one crouched with her ear close to the key-hole—her ear, for the would-be eavesdropper was Miss Pray.

She had gained the position with cat-like care and noiselessness, and, her little blue eyes twinkling, was now prepared to hear all that was said.

The next words were certainly startling.

"Andrew," said Bob soberly, "permit me fer ter ask how much bullion you've stole from ther Bonanza Bank?"

CHAPTER XV.

"A HEAP O' EXPERIENCE."

WELLBURN started. It was not strange that he did, for the words spoken by Hotspur Bob were enough to create consternation. He looked at the Bowery detective with alarm plainly expressed on his face, and his voice was unsteady as he replied:

"What do you mean, boy?"

"Wal, I shall be pleased ter elocidate, but

thar is that ter say which mebbe you won't want ev'rybody ter hear. Ef I'm ter work up ther crookedness that exists among yer family hyar, 'tain't jest hunk ter let them onter no new p'int."

Olive Pray, still listening at the door, started as much as Wellburn had done. Cautious as Bob was trying to be, he had inadvertently given away a delicate secret; the acute mind of the listener at once grasped an important fact of the case.

"So that is what he is here for! The miserable little scoundrell! If we don't make it hot for him, I'll sell out."

And Miss Pray certainly had the will to do all she said.

The cashier took the hint and led Bob to the further end of the room, and, after that, no distinct sentence came to the eavesdropper's hearing. She was angry enough that it was so, but she had learned something of importance, and when she finally retreated to the lower part of the house, she startled Mrs. Wellburn by exclaiming:

"See here, old lady, we've got to be up and doing, or our game is lost. That vulgar Bowery boy is a spy right in our own house."

In the meanwhile, Bob o' the Bowery was telling his story to Wellburn. He was so sure that he had discovered the real state of affairs that he kept nothing back. Wellburn was plainly shown that, to casual view, he appeared to be a drunkard and a gambler, if not a fraudulent bank official, and he was shown more.

Bob told what he knew about Bargrade, except his real name; about Zadok Playfair, Steve Rellix and the rest of the gang; and the cashier listened in silent dismay. When Bob saw fit to stop, three words fell from the man's lips:

"I am ruined!"

"That depends," quickly answered the street detective. "Ef you're guilty, you be sort o' smashed ter artoms; but ef ther principle o' moral rectitude hez been yer guidin' star, I'll bring ye outer ther wilderness like Moses did ther British."

"Useless, useless! Playfair holds the reins of power."

"Not ef you're innercent—not fer Joseph! Not by a darned sight."

"Boy, you don't know all," hopelessly replied the cashier. "Once I was guilty of a great crime—I forged a check. It was soon after my marriage to the present Mrs. Wellburn, and before I lost all confidence in her. Her extravagance led me into financial distress, and I forged the check, intending to make it all right in a few days. Zadok Playfair discovered it. Did he expose me? No; he did a hundred times worse. Gaining possession of the check, he has held it over my head as a rod of chastisement ever since. I am in his power! I have known for some time that he was robbing the bank, but I could not interfere. I am helpless!"

"By hokey, I ain't, an' I'm goin' ter prove it."

"What can you do?"

"Make Zadok howl like a hyena—which same he is. Now, let us inwestigate. Do you know Steve Rellix?"

"Yes. He keeps a gambling-house on Grand street."

"Jes' so. Wal, why did he go howlin' round so?"

"I suppose he thought, because I went two or three times to his den, that he had me well hooked and would make a good deal of money out of me. Discovering that Bargrade was spying on me, he was afraid the man would break the thing up. As a result, he wanted to learn who Bargrade was, and why he was following me."

"That's ther way I reasoned ther measly thing out. Now, then, in referrin' to Bargrade, I've kep' back ther fact that I know his real name. I do know it, an' wanten know ef a s'pishion o' mine is korect. Who were Mrs. Dorcas Wellburn afore she met you?"

"She was a Brackett."

"Casually speakin', you come right in like a little man. Wal, Bargrade is, really, named Brackett, an' he must be yer wife's brother."

"I suspected as much."

"Yer see, him an' her hez been playin' a game fer ter slump yer, an' he thinks he is all hunk wi' Zadok, but that measly old rooster ain't got ther decency ter use nobody squar', an' it's his leetle game ter fool Brackett, an' all ther rest, an' slide ter Europe wi' ther scads."

"You have done remarkable work, my boy."

"Who? Me? Oh, that ain't nothin'! I've only put two an' two tergether; anybody kin tell that they make five. But, see yer', Andrew, have you been gamblin' an' gittin' boozey on poor whisky?"

"I must confess that I have, but I am not wholly to blame. For some time the strain on my nerves has been such that I have used liquor, but never excessively until of late. Some time since I became convinced that Zadok Playfair was storing his stolen money somewhere, with a man named Storow as a guardian. He was an old servant of the Playfairs, when they lived in Baltimore. I also learned that Storow frequented gambling-houses, and it was to find him that I began my downward path. I confess that I took to the excitement of playing and drinking eagerly, but it was the nervous excitement of an unhappy, doomed wretch."

"What was Storow's first name?"

"I don't know."

Bob was silent for a moment, and Wellburn added:

"One word about the man and woman who followed me the night we first met. The man was, of course, Brackett. Who was the woman? Was it Olive Pray?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"In my opinion, it was yer wife."

"I feared as much."

"Seems that they want a bigger hold on yer, so they hev been a-doggin' on yer ter find out all they could. Let 'em go it; we'll bring 'em up wi' a short turn."

"Useless, useless! Why should I struggle against fate?"

"Nouse a tall, but yer proper scheme is ter hop right inter ther harness with fate, pull wi' ther measy thing, an' either win or bust ther traces all ter fiddle-strings. Come, Andrew, brace up an' hev some style 'bout yer, an' we'll fix these conspirationers an' plant yer squar' on yer feet ag'in."

"Impossible!"

"Listen ter me, an' we'll see."

Bob drew nearer his companion and began speaking in an earnest voice. The interview lasted half an hour longer, but was finally put to an end by the sound of the dinner bell. Enough time had been given them, however, to arrange a plan, the boldness of which rather took Wellburn's breath away.

He had, however, been directed to a reputable detective; a friend of Bob's whose name was Wrixley; and an active campaign decided upon.

That night the Street-Boy Detective retired early, but it was some time before he slept. He reviewed all the points of the case as far as he had worked it up, and, though he was not quite sure of his position, felt considerable hope of success.

He was not awake as soon as usual in the morning, and when he did open his eyes he promptly arose and began dressing.

He had decided to see Detective Wrixley, himself, and that gentleman might at any moment be off on the work allotted to him.

"It's best ter bring ther hull thing right ter a focus, an' I'll git my shrunken shanks in motion an' whoop her up ter white heat."

Finishing dressing, he moved to the door, turned the key and—the door would not open!

"Hello! wot's ther defuglety?"

He tried it again, but without success.

"Sticks like Jersey mud, an' don't seem ter stick, neither. 'Pears like thar was somethin' heavy ag'in' ther door."

He tried it thoroughly with his shoulder, and, as it still remained fast, confirmation was given to a suspicion already in his mind.

"Shut in, b'hokey! Cons'gned ter durance vile, an' a prisoner in a new Bastille! Who's did it? Echo answers 'Who? an' I don't mind sayin' ter her that 'twere did by Dorcas an' her wheelers. Oh, she's wuss then a ward politician, she is. Shut in! Jess. so! Wal, I'm havin' a cheap experience with prison cells an' sich."

The young detective sat down to study the situation.

"I owe it all ter Dorcas, o' course, but why 'ah' wherfore? Hez she tumbled ter my status in this domicile? Apparently she hez, an' hyar she is, shet up like a barnyard fowl jest previous ter Christmas. Wal, we'll see ef I stay hyar!"

He arose and went to the window. Three stories below was a paved court; a fall there meant certain death. How, then, was he to escape? True, he might call for help from the window, but this was not in accordance with his plan. He wanted to escape silently and unseen.

Studying the situation with a critical eye, he saw that the house, as well as those that adjoined, had broad window-sills, and that the blinds, when thrown back, nearly touched.

He at once conceived the bold idea of escaping in this way.

It was a risky scheme in more ways than one.

He might fall and be dashed to death; his captors might be on the watch and push him off, or shoot him; or he might be seen by other people, worthy but mistaken, who would hand him over to an officer as a burglar.

"Got ter be did, though. Ain't no sort o' use hesitatin'; thar is work fer me ter do, an' I'm goin' out an' try it on. Them measy crooks think ez how they hev me foul, but I'll show 'em that things ain't wot they seems, sometimes—not fer Joseph!"

While mulling thus he was working his way out of the window, and he was soon poised in mid-air, as it were. It was a weak hold he had to support him, but he relied on the fact that he was himself a lightweight, and took the first step in his dangerous journey.

The other window was not far away, but if the blind gave way he would never reach it; a fall meant sure death.

Never venturing to look down, he swung himself lightly toward the next window.

Would he reach it, or shoot down to destruction?

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO WINS?

THERE was a moment of suspense, and then the Hotspur touched the stone slab in safety. He made sure of his balance, and then tried the window. It was not fastened, and he raised the sash and saw a companion room to his own, into which he promptly scrambled.

"Casualty speakin', ther gantlet is run, b'hokey! an' I hev only ter crack my heels an' crow. I'm still in Andrew's house, an' ef this door ain't locked, I'm sound on ther goose. Tain't, sure ez dogs is dogs!"

Sure enough, the door yielded to his touch, and he knew that the way was clear for further investigation.

He paused for a moment to consider his position. Of course, he had been fastened in the other chamber by the members of the family opposed to Andrew Wellburn, and he was shrewd enough to suspect that they had learned a good deal more about the cashier's plans than was good for Andrew. Such being the case, the latter ought to be notified at once.

Acting on this idea, Bob secured his cap and stole softly out of the house. As he passed the outer door, he had an agreeable surprise. There was Stumpy, his partner in the peanut business, looking at the house wistfully.

The lame boy came up at once.

"Why, they said you wasn't here, Bob."

"Who did?"

"The servant."

"Servants sometimes prevaricates w'en they's paid fer it. Step in out o' sight, Stumpy. See yer, I want you ter do an errand fer me."

"An errand? Of course I will, Bob."

"You know whar ther Bonanza Savings Bank is?"

"Of course."

"Wal, you go thar an' ax fer ther cashier, an' when ye see him, tell him ter come home, 'cause I want ter see him bad. Ketch on?"

"Oh! yes, an' I'll go at once."

"Do so, an' don't let grass grow under yer hoofs. Scoot! Slide! Git!"

Stumpy hastened away, and the Hotspur was about to re-enter the house when he caught sight of a familiar form down the street. It was that of Brackett, alias Bargrade.

Bob dodged in out of sight.

"Comin' hyar, I'll bet a gold-mine. Now, then, Bob o' ther Bowery, hyar's a chance fer you ter show yer p'int. Ef you kin overhear wot ther measy chap hez ter say ter his beloved sister, Dorcas, it may be a heap o' plums in ther pud-din'."

He retreated to a safe distance, and in a few moments Mr. Brackett pulled the bell, was admitted by a servant, and from there went on to the sitting-room, where Mrs. Wellburn and Miss Pray already were.

This delighted Bob, for it gave him a capital chance to listen, and he was speedily located at a door where he could overhear all.

The first distinct words came in Mrs. Wellburn's voice.

"What is the matter?"

"The matter is that we are ruined!"

It was Brackett who answered, and his voice was harsh and angry.

"Ruined!" echoed the woman. "What do you mean?"

"It is along of that villain, Playfair. I have evidence that he has been playing with us all the time; using us for his own ends; and that we won't get a cent out of the bank."

"Father!" exclaimed Olive. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, call me father; the truth may as well be told, since lying will do no good. Dorcas, if you can make your peace with Wellburn, you'd better do it; 'tis the only way by which you can realize your dream of fortune."

"It is too late!" tremulously replied the guilty wife. "I have angered him past endurance. He will never forgive me, and I suspect that he will soon insist on a separation."

"Can't Olive change her pretended love for Edward to real love, and marry him?"

"Not I!" cried the young woman. "I detest the black-faced brute, father; I won't marry him, anyhow!"

"Then we are all gone to ruin!" groaned Brackett.

"But, what is the matter? What has Playfair done?"

"Stolen all the money he can, secreted it, and got all ready to sail for Europe!"

"Tell on him! Have him arrested at once!"

"I dare not. He knows too much about me."

"Then we are indeed ruined!" nervously acknowledged Mrs. Wellburn. "Oh! why did I anger Andrew so, and make him my enemy? It was your fault! You led me to expect a fortune from the bank; it was your fault!"

"Recriminations are useless now. I thought we had Wellburn in our power. Playfair told me your husband was a defaulter, but it was a lie. The only hold the scoundrel ever had on him was a forged check, made out by Andrew in a moment of desperation, and that was not only made good, but the evidence is gone. The check went to ashes when Playfair's house burned two years ago."

"Hooray!"

This word of exultation came from Bob, but it was uttered under his breath, unheard by the conspirators.

"But, how do you know that Playfair is working against us?" Mrs. Wellburn asked.

"I have the confession from a man named Ben Storow. He was once Playfair's servant, is still in his confidence, and will sail to Europe with him. This man is a danger on a Steve Relix's."

"Who is Relix?"

"True, you don't know; I only learned last night. Well, he keeps a gambling-house on Grand street, and it was from there that Andrew had come that night when we dogged him in the carriage. Relix has been bitter against me, but a little money has made it all right. Wellburn, it seems, went to the gambling-house on purpose to meet Storow, for he suspected that Zadok was stealing from the bank and storing his ill-gotten gains with Storow."

"Then we are ruined!" helplessly observed Mrs. Wellburn.

"Don't keep saying that like a parrot!" retorted Miss Olive, with her usual respect for her elders. "Father, why can't we buy up Storow, and get a share of the secreted money?"

"He can't be bought."

"Well, frighten him, then."

"Useless, again. He thinks they have a sure thing, and told me what he did, while insolently snapping his fingers in my face. No, we are helpless. There is that in the record of each one of us which would send us to prison if made public. Zadok Playfair knows this; it will never do to anger him."

What was that?

Bob heard a sound and turned his head. Several persons had entered the front door. First came Andrew Wellburn, and behind him, were Stumpy, Zadok Playfair, Ben Storow, and a fine, soldierly-looking man.

The Bowery boy recognized the latter joyfully. It was his detective friend, Wrixley, and the glimpse of other men outside showed that Wrixley had not come alone.

Bob vacated his position and hastened to the detective.

"Say, be them two your prisoners?"

He pointed to Storow and the villainous President of the Bonanza Savings Bank.

"Not mine, but yours," was the reply. "When I got word from you I used due zeal, and it wasn't long before I became satisfied that there was evidence enough to warrant the arrest."

Wellburn pointed to the sitting-room.

"Who is in there?" he asked, in a hard voice.

"Brackett an' ther women, boss."

"Take him!" said the cashier, with a wave of his hand.

Wrixley unceremoniously walked into the room, and the others followed. The previous inmates had arisen and were trying to look very indignant, but the sight of Wellburn and Bob wilted them!

The detective walked up to Brackett.

"Allow me, sir," he said, with extreme politeness, and, before Brackett had recovered from his startled surprise, handcuffs were on his wrists.

It was Miss Olive Pray-Brackett who first gained the power of speech.

"How dare you?" she cried, shaking a small fist at Wrixley.

"Beauty makes me brave, miss," he replied, gallantly, "and the jail fairly hankers for Mr. Brackett, alias Saul Nettleton."

Brackett grew whiter than ever.

"All is lost!" he groaned.

"Oh! they can't fix you for more than ten years on that old affair, and by testifying against Playfair, and with usual allowance off for good behavior you ought to get out in five," Wrixley coolly observed.

"I'll tell all I know," said Brackett, eagerly, turning on the bank-president.

"Don't you do it!" cried Miss Olive. "Hold your tongue, you fool!"

"Dear lady," interrupted the detective, ironically, "pray don't talk so to your progenitor. It is undutiful, and, besides, is so much like Lillie Starr, the confidence woman!"

Olive dropped into a chair. She had suddenly grown almost as pale as her father, and seemed very weak.

"Another one laid out!" remarked the Hotspur, coolly. "Seems ter me you're right up in pedigree, Wrix. Go fer ther crooks! Weed 'em out! Give ther decent folks a chance ter git fresh air. How is Andrew comin' out?"

"Mr. Wellburn is all right, but I suspect he will want to get rid of his family."

The cashier had been looking accusingly at his dumfounded wife, but, as a light hand touched his arm, he turned. Willis had timidly entered, and his father folded him to his arms. The gentle boy was the balm of his bruised heart.

"Thar's one he won't want fer be divorced from," put in Bob. "Will is o' ther sort o' folks who fill our halls o' Congress an' keep out o' jail, an' he's a good one from ther toenails up. Brace up, Will, fer I'm on yer side, an' bimeby, we'll hev a talk 'bout Julius Caesar, ther chap who invented ther telephone, an' other Mytho-illogical chaps. Mr. Z. Playfair, sir, ter wit, namely, allow me ter ask wer'fore you look at me so mighty sour an' rampaginous. Hey?"

"I am told that I owe my downfall to you, you young scoundrel!" hissed the defaulter.

"Casually speakin', I'm ther identicle rooster; but w'ot fer do you ride so rusty? True, you'll prob'ly winter at Sing Sing a few hundred years, but w'ot o' that, ez long ez ther int'rests o' harmony, good order an' Injun gruel is duly sarved? Cheer up, Zadok! Sing Sing is a boss place fer meditation; an' I'll bet yer muskel will hump right up like a black cat's back in a midnight prize-fight. Labor is pop'lar nowadays, ole boy, an' you kin learn piles o' trades afore ye git out. But I see ther rest on ye want ter orate, so I'll retire in favor o' some other member. I ain't a hog—not fer Joseph!"

Zadok Playfair never held his head up, as of yore, after that day. He had played for big stakes and lost all, and it was a terrible blow. He went to Sing Sing, a crushed man, to serve fifteen years.

He had plenty of company.

Brackett got five years; Ben Storow, two; Bet, the negress, who had a dark record, twelve; and Steve Rellix, three years.

Olive Brackett, who could easily have been proved Lillie Starr, the confidence woman, fled, and is now supposed to be West.

Mrs. Wellburn was notified that she could go in peace. She went promptly, nobody knew where.

Edward Wellburn, greatly humiliated to find how he had been deceived by Olive, showed signs of real repentance, and taking a small sum of money, set out for Colorado to begin life anew.

There were days when the senior Wellburn feared for the result of the investigation made by the bank directors, but he had made a full, truthful statement, and he was retained in office, unapproached.

His family is small now, for he has nobody but Willis, but the boy is the pride and comfort of his life. After the stormy scenes of the past, both are happy.

Nearly all the funds taken from the bank by Playfair were recovered, and the institution goes bravely on. They would give Bob a place, but he will not take it.

He has money in the bank, accumulated little by little, and as he can take his choice of life, he

prefers that of the open air, where he can look for "measly schemes an' gallus conspiracies," and hunt the criminals down.

The peanut-stand is still looked after by Stumpy, who prefers that work to the rough experience Bob has in catching rogues and rascals.

THE END.

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BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 7 The Flying Yankee; or, The Ocean Outcast.
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- 24 Diamond Dirk; or, The Mystery of the Yellowstone.
- 63 The Shadow Ship; or, The Rival Lieutenants.
- 75 The Boy Detective; or, The Cruise of the Sea-Wolf.
- 102 Dick Dead-Eye, the Boy Smuggler.
- 111 The Sea-Devil; or, The Midshipman's Legacy.
- 116 The Hussar Captain; or, The Hermit of Hell Gata.
- 197 Little Grit; or, Bessie, the Stock-Tender's Daughter.
- 204 Gold Plumet; or, The Kid-Glove Sport.
- 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Reins.
- 222 Grit, the Bravo Sport; or, The Woman Trailer.
- 229 Crimson Kate; or, The Cowboy's Triumph.
- 237 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
- 245 Merle, the Middy; or, The Freestone Heir.
- 250 The Midshipman Mutineer; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
- 264 The Floating Feather; or, Merle Monte's Treasure Island.
- 267 The Gold Ship; or, Merle, the Condemned.
- 276 Merle Monte's Cruise; or, The Chase of "The Gold Ship."
- 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Bride.
- 284 The Sea Marauder; or, Merle Monte's Pledge.
- 287 Billy Blue-Eyes, the Boy Rover of the Rio Grande.
- 304 The Dead Soot Dandy; or, Benito, the Boy Bugler.
- 308 Aeno Kit; or, Dead Shot Dandy's Double.
- 314 The Mysterious Marauder; or, The Boy Bugler's Long Trail.
- 377 Bonnel, the Boy Rover; or, The Flagless Schooner.
- 383 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
- 387 Warpath Will, the Boy Phantom.
- 398 Seawolf, the Boy Lieutenant.
- 402 Isador, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
- 407 The Boy Insurgent; or, The Cuban Vendetta.
- 412 The Wild Yachtman; or, The War-Cloud's Cruise.
- 429 Duncan Dare, the Boy Refugee.
- 433 A Cabin Boy's Luck; or, The Corsair.
- 437 The Sea Raider.
- 441 The Ocean Firefly; or, A Middy's Vengeance.
- 446 Haphazard Harry; or, The Scapgoat of the Sea.
- 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferra of New York.
- 451 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Counter.
- 474 Flora; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
- 488 Ferret's Aloft; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
- 487 Nevada Ned, the Revolver Ranger.
- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. Wm. F. Cody).

- 8 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

- 118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
- 122 Phil Hardy, the Boy Boy.
- 126 Picaune Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
- 130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
- 142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
- 147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
- 152 Black Beas, Will Wildfire's Racer.
- 157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
- 162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
- 165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
- 170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
- 174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
- 179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
- 188 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
- 187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
- 189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
- 196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
- 206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
- 212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
- 220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
- 225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Dandy.
- 235 Shadow Sam, the Messenger Boy.
- 242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
- 252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
- 262 The Young Sleuth; or, Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.
- 274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
- 289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
- 298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
- 305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in the Quaker City.
- 324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
- 331 Tony Thornc, the Vagabond Detective.
- 353 The Reporter-Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
- 367 Wide-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
- 379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
- 403 Firefly Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
- 425 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
- 428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
- 432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
- 436 Billy Brick, the Jolly Vagabond.
- 466 Wide-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
- 479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
- 488 Wild Dick Racket.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 11 The Two Detectives; or, The Fortunes of a Bowery Girl.
- 76 Abe Colt, the Crow-Killer; or, The Great Fighting Man of the West.
- 79 Sol Ginger, the Giant Trapper.
- 238 Joe Buck of Angels and His Boy Pard.
- 447 New York Nat, a Tale of Tricks and Traps in Gotham.
- 458 New England Nick; or, The Fortunes of a Foundling.
- 464 Nimble Nick, the Circus Prince.
- 493 Tuslo Ted, the Arizona Sport.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

- 6 Bill Bidson, Trapper.
- 8 Seth Jones; or, The Captives of the Frontier.
- 10 Nat Todd; or, The Fate of the Sioux Captive.
- 21 The Frontier Angel.
- 98 The Boy Miners; or, The Enchanted Island.
- 132 The Hunted Hunter; or, The Strange Horseman.
- 254 The Half-Blood; or, The Panther of the Plains.
- 271 The Huge Hunter; or, The Steam Prairie Maw.

BY OLL COOMES.

- 5 Vagabond Joe, the Young Wandering Jew.
- 13 The Dumb Spy.
- 27 Antelope Abe, the Boy Guide.
- 31 Keen-Knife, the Prince of the Prairies.
- 41 Lasso Jack, the Young Mustang.
- 58 The Borer King; or, The Secret Foo.
- 71 Delaware Dick, the Young Ren'er Spy.
- 74 Hawk-eye Harry, the Young Trapper & Co.
- 83 Rollo, the Boy Ranger.
- 134 Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman.
- 148 Scar-Face Saul, the Silent Hunter.
- 146 Silver Star, the Boy Knight.
- 153 Eagle Kit, the Boy Demon.
- 163 Little Texas, the Young Mustang.
- 178 Old Solitary, the Hermit Trapper.
- 182 Little Hurricane, the Boy Captain.
- 202 Prospect Pete; or, The Young Outlaw Heroism.
- 208 The Boy Hercules; or, The Prairie Tramp.
- 218 Tiger Tom, the Texas Terror.
- 221 Dashing Dick; or, Trapper Tom's Castle.
- 228 Little Wildfire, the Young Prairie Nod.
- 238 The Parson Detective; or, The Little Ranger.
- 243 The Disguised Guide; or, Wild Raven, the Ranger.
- 261 Dare-Devil Dan, the Young Prairie Ranger.
- 272 Minkskin Mike, the Boy Sharpshooter.
- 290 Little Foxfire, the Boy Spy.
- 300 The Sky Demon; or, Rainbolt, the Ranger.
- 384 Whip-Ling Joe, the Boy Ranchero.
- 409 Hercules; or, Dick, the Boy Ranger.
- 417 Webfoot Mose, the Tramp Detective.
- 422 Baby Sam, the Boy Giant of the Yellowstone.
- 444 Little Buckskin, the Young Prairie Centaur.
- 457 Wingedfoot Fred; or, Old Polar Saul.
- 463 Tamarac Tom, the Big Trapper Boy.
- 478 Old Tom Rattler, the Red River Epidemic.
- 482 Stonewall Bob, the Boy Trojan.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

- 28 Nick o' the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
- 37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
- 47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captain.
- 64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
- 82 Kit Harefoot, the Wood-Hawk.
- 94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
- 106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
- 123 Klown Charley, the White Mustang.
- 139 Judge Lynch, Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
- 155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
- 169 Tornado Tom; or, Injun Jack From Red Com.
- 184 Ned Temple, the Border Boy.
- 198 Arkansas; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
- 207 Navajo Nick, the Boy Gold Hunter.
- 215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Topknot's Crusade.
- 231 Plucky Phil; or, Rosa, the Ro Jezebel.
- 241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
- 255 Captain Apollo, the King-Pin of Bowie.
- 267 The Buckskin Detective.
- 279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
- 294 Dynamite Dan; or, The Bowls Blade of Cochetopa.
- 302 The Mountain Detective; or, The Trigger Bar Bolly.
- 316 Old Eclipse, Tramp Card of Arizona.
- 326 The Ten Pards; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
- 336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the La so.
- 345 Pitless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
- 353 Pitless Matt; or, The Terrible Six.
- 368 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
- 386 Captain Outlaw; or, the B. canner's Girl Foo.
- 396 Rough Rob; or, The win Champions of Blue Blazes.
- 411 The Silken Lassie; or, The Rose of Rautu Robin.
- 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
- 425 Texas Tramp, the Border Rattler.
- 436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox.
- 445 The City Sleuths; or, Red Rolfe's Pirece.
- 461 One Against Fifty; or, The Last Man of Keno Bar.
- 470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
- 477 The Excelsior Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
- 499 Single Sight, the One-Eyed Sport.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 67 Patent-Leather Joe; or, Old Rattle-snake, the Charmer.
- 175 Captain Arizona; or, Patent-Leather Joe's Big Game.
- 198 Captain Mask; or, Patent-Leather Joe's Defeat.
- 219 Despard, the Duellist; or, The Mountain Vampires.
- 334 A Tough Boy; or, The Dwar's Revenge.
- 368 Little Tornado; or, The Outcasts of the Glen.
- 378 Little Jingo; or, the Quaker Pard.
- 388 Little Oh-my; or, Caught in His Own Trap.
- 401 Little Shoo-Fly; or, A Race for a Ranch.
- 408 Little Leather-Breeches; or, Old Jumbo's Curse.
- 431 Little Ah Sin; or, The Curse of Blood.
- 451 Colorado Kate, a Tale of the Mines.
- 480 Three Jolly Pards.

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- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
98 William Street, New York.